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PROVERBS AND TIRUKKURAL:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis, **Proverbs and Tirukkural: A Comparative Study** is a research work done by me under the guidance and supervision of **Dr.V.Sam Sahayam**, Professor of English, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, during the period of my study from April, 1993 to April, 1999, and that the thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar titles.

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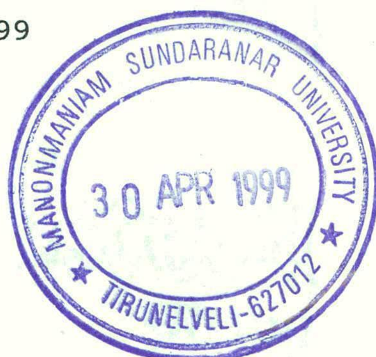
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis, **Proverbs and Tirukkural: A Comparative Study** is a research work done by **Mrs. D.Sakuntala Davamoni**, during the period of her research from April, 1993 to April, 1999 at the Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, that the thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award to the candidate of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or similar titles, and that the thesis as a whole in its approach to the subject, its organization and treatment of material and in its critical evaluation, represents independent work on the part of the candidate.

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CONTENTS

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D.Sakuntala Davamoni

Scheme of Transliteration

VOWELS

Short				Long	
அ	a			ஆ	ā
இ	i			ஈ	ī
உ	u			ஊ	ū
எ	e	ai	ஐ	ஏ	ē
ஒ	o	au	ஔ	ஓ	ō

CONSONANTS

க்	k	ங்	ṅ	ய்	y
ச்	c	ஞ்	ñ	ர்	r
ட்	ṭ	ண்	ṇ	ல்	l
த்	t	ந்	n	வ்	v
ப்	p	ம்	m	ழ்	ḻ
ற்	ṟ	ன்	ṉ	ள்	ḷ
ஸ	s	ஷ்	ṣ	ஹ	ḥ
		ஜ	j		

ABBREVIATIONS USED

BSFL - Bible for Spirit - Filled Living

EOP - An Exposition of Proverbs

IB - Interpreter's Bible

ICC - International Critical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs

NIV - The NIV Study Bible, New International Version.

NKJ - The Open Bible - New King James Version

P - Proverbs

T - G.U.Pope's translation of Tirukkural. The Sacred Kural of Tiruvalluvanayanar.

T1 - Tiruvalluvar Tirukkural. Trans. Drew, W.H. and John Lazarus.

TPM - T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram

TSEL - Tirumathi Sornammal Endowment Lectures

PREFACE

The book of **Proverbs** in the **Bible** and Tiruvalluvar's **Tirukkural** in Tamil are classic works of perennial charm, primarily dealing with the ethos governing two remarkable societies, one pertaining to the ancient Near East and the other to the Orient respectively. The works abound in common themes and motifs like ethics governing materialistic pursuits, man-woman relationship and the individual in the context of the society as well as their pronounced political, theological and philosophical preoccupations. Above all, both the works are basically humanistic and advocate the supreme need for 'agape', the divine love. Using the general format of comparative methodology, this thesis analyses the range and quality of the ethical code laid down by one society, in the light of the code set down by the other.

Both King Solomon and Tiruvalluvar are acknowledged legislators of tremendous imaginative and philosophic power. Their works thus emerge as veritable models of subtle craftsmanship, displaying a high degree of sophistication in their intellectual content and diction, thus challenging the modern reader to delve deep into the mystery and magic that inform their 'gestalts'. The range of their concern is enormous,

bordering on the global. Their concern is universal as they both effortlessly transcend the limits imposed by their respective societies and endeavour to enhance the over-all order of the entire universe.

While many believe that King Solomon is an agent of the Divine Author of the Holy Writ, it is interesting to note that Tiruvalluvar too has been hailed by numerous critics as an incomparable poet, whose vision partakes of the 'divine' order of the universe. King Solomon, apart from being an inspired author of a part of the Holy Scriptures, is also reputed to be the wisest monarch of the Jews. **Tirukkural** has been popularly accorded the status of a **Common Universal Scripture** (*Ulakapotumarai*).

It is significant that both the writers look to the character of the human individual as their common measure and parameter, to formulate their ethical codes to improve the order of the world as a whole.

There are striking similarities in the spiritual, moral, political and literary values of the works compared. Their authors are single-minded in their passionate commitment to prescribe the ethical codes that would mould the right kind of citizens in their respective societies. They both show a profound concern for a life of integrity and moral vigour in all avenues

of living, and hence, they are comparable in respect of their 'thema', 'rohstoff' and certain other self-conscious techniques they have employed. This thesis aims at comparing both the works in the context of their different backgrounds and analysing the common 'motifs' employed in respect of the familial, social and political spheres which affect the behaviour of the human individual.

The opening chapter, **Age and Background**, presents an analysis of the times of the writers and the circumstances in which the works were conceived and written. **Proverbs** belongs to the category of "Wisdom Literature", ascribed mainly to king Solomon of the 8th century B.C., consisting of eight sections including contributions from several authors, belonging to different periods which show signs of the influences of the Egyptian **Amen-em-ope**, the Mesopotamian **Ahikar** and other Wisdom Books of Babylonia, Syria and Edom. **Tirukkural**, being the foremost ethical literary work of Tamil Nadu, can be viewed on par with the Hebrew Wisdom Literature and it consists of 1330 couplets, with ten such couplets constituting each chapter.

There is still some mystery surrounding the exact Age of Tiruvalluvar. After a close scrutiny of the internal evidence available, eminent scholars like

M.Srinivasa Iyengar, V.V.S.Aiyar, P.S.Subramania Bharati and T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram have ventured to confirm the single authorship in respect of **Tirukkural**, and place it at a period not later than the closing years of the Sangam Age, i.e. the 3rd century A.D. While G.U.Pope lays claim for a possible Christian influence on the author of **Tirukkural**, Prof.Vaiyapuri Pillai considers him an eminent Jain and Seethalaisathanar, author of **Manimēkalai**, an erudite Buddhist. On the other hand, several Saivites consider him an authority of Saiva Siddhānta. **Tirukkural** itself makes an earnest endeavour to bridge the yawning gulf among all the creeds discussed above, and thus touches the highest watermark of eclecticism in the history of Tamil culture.

The second chapter, **Proverbs and Tirukkural as Wisdom Literature**, attempts to analyse the Wisdom tradition in both the works and shows how elements of didacticism, lofty ideals and pragmatic vision related to man in society, are all embodied in the couplet form which can be most easily committed to memory. It also highlights the fact that in these ancient works, wisdom which is intimately connected with a theistic outlook contributes significantly to the inner harmony and equanimity of an individual, while promoting social order simultaneously.

However, whereas the Hebrew ontology of the Divine tends to be definitive and the author of **Proverbs** makes clear-cut anthropomorphic responses to such a God in the form of virtues and vices in the ethical sphere, Tiruvalluvar conceptualizes God simply as the Primal Being who is utterly transcendent of any emotive quality, though unequivocally in tune with the concept of **Dharmā** or moral laws which can be summed up in terms of purity of mind, thought and conduct. Both the writers consider God as the Prime Source of Wisdom, wielding an omnipotent sway over Man and the universe. The Wisdom writer's pronouncement on the principle of predestination and 'free will' in the context of human life is something yet to be judged, in stark contrast to Tiruvalluvar's well-known concept of 'fate' and **Karmā**.

The third chapter, **Ethos of Familial Bonds**, dwells on the origin and significance of the terminology of ethics as a genre and its relevance to **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural**, when viewed against their respective intellectual climates and cultural backgrounds. Especially, their common emphasis on pragmatic ethos which governs all familial bonds, renders them eminently comparable. The ideal citizen in both the works is a householder, utterly free from vices of intemperance and immorality, thoroughly devoted to his wife, children and interests of the family. The works under discussion

favour love and integrity in domestic life and earnestly advocate the cause of monogamy. In both the works, the wife is assigned a pivotal role in ensuring the prosperity of the household. Adultery is summarily castigated as a heinous crime, worse than harlotry. In such nefarious modes of relationship, the woman is depicted as an active seductress and man as a gullible victim. Children are regarded as priceless possessions. Filial love is hailed as a mark of wisdom and parental responsibility as a fulcrum in moulding upright citizens in both the works. The Hebrew parents extracted the strictest compliance to moral codes from their sons, and dishonouring parents was considered an abhorrent crime, among the Jews. Though Tiruvalluvar does not dwell elaborately on the nurture of children, he highlights the imperative need to bring up wise children, who, in turn, would bring honour to their parents.

The fourth chapter entitled **Ethics for Social Harmony** compares the social life in Palestine and ancient Tamil Nadu during the respective periods of the authors. Pronouncements in respect of man's relationship with his friends, neighbours and the poor are analysed here. The works exalt virtues such as kindness, generosity, benevolence, compassion, charity, truthfulness, justice, equity, impartiality, loyalty,

humility and integrity as they tend to render any individual possessing these qualities, a lovable citizen, while decrying negative traits like slandering, scandal-mongering, tale-bearing, violence, anger, jealousy, covetousness and stealth. On the other hand, while the Jewish wisdom writer pronounces his commandments in an authoritative tone, Tiruvalluvar makes his observations on ethics employing a persuasive, essentially psychological approach. The works promise rich blessings for men of charitable dispositions and condemn those who devise evil against their neighbours. They highlight the value of steadfast and loyal friends while condemning in one voice the 'fair-weather' friends. The triad virtues in friendship, namely, correcting a person from his wrong course, offering him timely counsel and respecting his feelings are stressed by both the authors. Tiruvalluvar in particular, is keen on dwelling on each and every aspect of such intimate relationships.

The fifth chapter entitled **Codes of Courtly Conduct** deals with the origin of kingship, its relevance in the modern era and the role of ministers in government. Virtues such as mercy, benevolence, truth, justice and love for the poor are to be cultivated by the ruler, in order to ensure political stability and social prosperity in his land. The qualities to be

eschewed are sexual immorality , incontinence , drinking and injustice. The wicked should find no place in the presence of the ruler. While **Proverbs** upholds the divine right of kings in the most uncompromising terms, Tiruvalluvar considers the king only as the custodian of **Dharmā**. Delay, oblivion, sloth, sleep and gambling are to be eschewed by every wise ruler. As regards the values and virtues of the counsellor, both make several common observations. Ministers should offer only wise counsel even if it happens to be apparently displeasing to the king. The virtues of a counsellor are courteous behaviour, truthfulness, fidelity, diligence, gentleness, patience, forbearance and the capacity for choosing the right words at the right time, and the qualities to be eschewed are disloyalty, sluggishness, babbling and haste. Tiruvalluvar prefers patience and wisdom to rash misadventures. He also exhorts the ruler to show utmost forbearance till complete victory is secured. Further, Tiruvalluvar commends intuitive wisdom that enables a counsellor to read the unuttered thoughts of the monarch as a brilliant, desirable virtue.

The sixth chapter entitled **From a Feminist Focus** traces the origin and growth of the feminist movement in recent times in Israel and in India, and studies the status of women as obtained in **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural.**

It is remarkable that both the works call the virtuous woman a 'veritable treasure'. **Proverbs** hails the woman who is industrious, sagacious, chaste and efficient in managing business interests as a crown to her husband, whereas the woman in **Tirukkural**, possessing the household virtues of frugality, thrift, industry and chastity, endows her husband with a leonine gait. Chastity, in both the works, implies obedience and a rocky strength of moral purpose. **Tirukkural** emphasizes the need for the woman to honour her husband, regardless of the latter's social status and accords such a woman a divine stature, meriting abundant blessings. The works enjoin chastity for man also and condemn adultery in one voice. While **Proverbs** stresses the role of woman in establishing one's house, Tiruvalluvar lauds the efforts of raising a family as a manly act and raises man to the position of the natural head in the family. However, it is interesting to note that Tiruvalluvar warns man not to give his soul entirely to the lure of his wife, as only shame would result from a slavish devotion on the part of the male. The Jewish wisdom writer, on the other hand, maintains silence on this issue. Both **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** instruct man to keep himself away from a contentious woman. Both the works accord an honoured place to mothers and regard wise children as a source of perennial joy to their parents. While

Proverbs comes down hard on disobedient children, Tiruvalluvar does not touch upon this aspect.

The seventh chapter, **Salient Literary Features**, deals with the comparative merits of the two writers as creative artists, in the light of the basic tenets of style, such as diction, structure, figures of speech, imagery, etc.

The closing chapter, **Summing Up**, briefly summarises and consolidates all the conclusions drawn in the course of the research project. Both **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** are treated throughout as valuable works of literary art. On the whole, an eclectic approach has been adopted and M.L.A Style Sheet IV Edition has been followed in respect of methodology.

CHAPTER ONE

AGE AND BACKGROUND

The Book of **Proverbs** is popularly believed to be a comprehensive anthology of moral and ethical instructions, whose basic goal is imparting wisdom and discernment. The major part of this work is associated with the Jewish king Solomon of Israel of the 7th century B C

Critical opinions in respect of the origin and authority of **Proverbs** vary considerably. According to J.Terence Forestall,

> Although the entire book is attributed to Solomon (P1:1), only two collections, P10:1-P22:16 and P25:1-P29:27, are in direct literary dependence upon him (**The Jerome Biblical Commentary** 495).

According to several critics, the book consists of eight sections written during different periods and includes contributions from several authors and editors. For instance, W.O.E. Oesterley is of the view that

> The first collection comprised of P1:7 - P9:18 in which the conception of wisdom marks the highest development in respect of acquisition of knowledge. It has a structure which marks the latest development in the literary form of

wisdom literature. A similar structure is the characteristic of the **Wisdom of Ben Sira**, an Egyptian book of wisdom. This section is intended to be an introduction to the **Proverbs** of Solomon beginning at Chapter X. There are, therefore, good grounds for assigning the first collection of **Proverbs** to the middle of the third century B C (**The Book of Proverbs** 24)

The second collection P10:1 - P22:16 which forms the central part of the book has a distinct literary form of its own: "The general rule in this collection is that each verse consists of a self-contained couplet wholly independent of its neighbour" (14). The couplets in this collection are of three kinds of parallelism, namely, antithetic parallelism (P10:14), comparative parallelism (P10:26) and synonymous parallelism (P14:18). Chapters 10-15 of **Proverbs** consist of couplets containing antithetic parallelism whereas this form occurs only on rare occasions in Chapters 16-22 which consist in the main, the other kinds of parallelism.

Interestingly enough, C.H.Toy finds an underlying numerological implication in **Proverbs**:

> This collection contains 375 proverbs and this corresponds with the numerical value of the

Hebrew letters. It is assigned to the middle of the eighth century B C (**The International Critical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs** 28).

The subsequent collection P21:17 - P23:14, bears no title, it being annexed to the preceding ones and assigned the same date i.e., the 8th century B C. These primarily consist of quatrains which form essentially a development of the couplet form.

The fourth collection, consisting of Chapters 25-29, bears a long prefatory note. These are also **Proverbs** of Solomon which men of Hezekiah, King of Judah copied out (P25:1). Gressman regards it as useful for assigning the date of the collection. It is self-evident that these verses originated during a period of monarchy, and hence, according to critics, the two Solomonic collections "may therefore be dated at any rate not later than 700 B C " (Oesterley 25)

The remaining four collections P30:1-14, P30:15-33, P31:1-9 and P31:10-31 are independent pieces as indicated by the vast differences among them in respect of their contents. In fact, according to theological historians, these four pieces are believed to be excerpts from other Wisdom Books, not necessarily derived from any specific Hebrew Book. Further, they do not offer any definite indications whatsoever of the

date of their origin. C.H.Toy observes: "The style of the last section P31:10-31 suggests a considerably later date" (**ICC** 30). Moreover, the religious ideal of the woman portrayed here, is not found elsewhere in the **Old Testament.** Prof C.H.Toy, an expert in interpretative studies of the Bible, is perhaps correct in assigning to it the 2nd century B.C , as the most probable date of composition.

Like **Proverbs, Tirukkural** too has continued to exercise an abiding authority on all major ethical issues of the Tamil society in India, since its time of origin and is generally considered as "a work of maxims, a treatise on popular ethics" (K.Appadurai 16). However, mystery surrounds its origin till date, in respect of its date of composition:

> It does not give any explicit clue to the historical and chronological date .... Writers have to depend mainly on the style and subject matter of **Tirukkural** (H.A.Popley 6).

M.Srinivasa Iyengar and P.T.Srinivasa Iyengar fix the date of this work, for various reasons as the 2nd century A.D. Dr. P.S.Subramania Bharati, after a close scrutiny of the internal evidences available, suggests that **Tirukkural** can be assigned a date "certainly later

than the dates suggested in respect of **Ahanānūru** and **Pattupāttu**" (Ramanantha Bharati 14).

V.V.S.Aiyar assigns the date of **Tirukkural's** composition to the period 100-300 A D. Recent scholarship has also confirmed the view that **Tirukkural** is posterior to **Tolkāppiam** of the I century B C. As there are quotations from **Tirukkural** in **Puranānūru** (34:6,7), **Silappadikāram** (21:34) and **Manimēkalai** (22:59-61) which belong to the period between 2nd and 5th centuries A D, majority of scholars place it in the second century. Tiruvalluvar is considered to be a contemporary of the Third Tamil Academy of the first century A D (M.Muthuraman 12). Prof. T.P. Meenakshi Sundaram is of the following opinion:

> There is a tradition that the self-conceited Sangam poets were brought to their senses by Tiruvalluvar and **Tiruvalluvamālai** was sung on that occasion (**Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar** 3).

Moreover, T.P. Meenakshi Sundaram finds certain similarities in the phraseology of **Tirukkural** and the Sangam works. As for the linguistic traits, one may however point out that the stylized language of the Sangam poets could not have been the day-to-day spoken idiom of the common people of the day. Tiruvalluvar, in his eclectic attitude, must have preferred to employ the

most appropriate words from the highly literary as well as the natural language of the day. In any case, as T.P. Meenakshi Sundaram observes,

> One cannot place **Tirukkural** much later than the closing years of the Sangam Age, i.e. 3rd century A.D. for it preserves certain aspects of the older language in spite of its acceptance of the new developments
>
> (**Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar** 5).

Several Indian scholars of **Tirukkural** assign it a date not later than the 2nd century A.D. The primary cause for such a conjecture of the time of conception has been referred to by M.Murugesa Mudaliar:

> Tiruvalluvar was a contemporary of Elela Simha and it had a tradition that **Tirukkural** was published in Madurai Sangam in the reign of Ugra Peruvaluti (**Tmt.Sornammal Endowment Lectures** 521).

With regard to the source of **Proverbs**, the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrews embodied in the form of proverbial sayings, has a two-fold origin. It is the outcome of everyday experience on the one hand and religious perception on the other. Originally, both types of **Proverbs** could have been in vogue in the oral, formal tradition. As W.O.E. Oesterley puts it,

> In its origin, there is not necessarily anything specifically Hebrew about it since the ordinary experiences of life are common to humanity in general (**Book of Proverbs** 33).

In fact, the work as such attempts to express simply a truth of everyday experience as is evidenced by the following verse: "A prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself but the simple pass on and are punished" (P27:12).

According to **I Kings** IV 30, 31,

> Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan Ezruhile, and Heman and Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol.

According to W.O.E.Oesterley, "the children of the east in the above verse refer to Bedouin Arabs, and the sons of Mahol were Edomites" (**Book of Proverbs** 34).

Further, as **Proverbs** 30:1 seems to affirm, it is possible that Mãssa is a place name referring to a region in Transjordan originally inhabited by the Ishmalites" (**Genesis** 25:14). In course of time, however, Israelite families must have settled in the Ishmalite land bringing with them their religion for,

after all, "Agur is a worshipper of Yahweh" (P30:9) and both "Agur and Lemuel have merited a place among the inspired writing" (Rev. Reginald C Fuller 510).

If the above historical information is true, **Proverbs** 30:1-14 marks a collection of sayings which came originally from an Arabian source, and the same source may have been the origin for the words of wisdom conveyed in P31:1-9. Also, we come across ample indications elsewhere in **The Bible** that the Hebrews were not unfamiliar with the wisdom of Babylonia, Egypt, Arabia, Syria and Edom as can be seen in **Job** 2:11, for instance. When we compare the **Book of Proverbs** with the Wisdom literature of ancient Egypt and Babylonia, we shall also find indisputable proof that the Wisdom Literature in the **Bible** formed part of the world literature.

The frequently recurring phrase 'my son' in **The Babylonian Book of Proverbs** figures prominently in certain sections of **Proverbs** under discussion and the **Proverbs of Ahikar** "which originally came from Mesopotamia" (Charles T Fritsch 767). It is interesting to note that between **Proverbs** and these Babylonian sources, W.O.E.Oesterley finds "over fifty parallels and similarities in thoughts and words" (**Book of Proverbs** 37).

The following are just some such examples:

> The wicked are overthrown and are no more
> but the house of the righteous will stand
> (P12:7)
>
> My son, the wicked falleth and riseth not;
> but the just man is not moved, for God is with
> him (**Ahikar**).

Further, there are many more Egyptian books of wisdom literature extant today than Babylonian books of wisdom, though the latter's influence on Hebrew Wisdom Literature seems more pronounced. According to Charles T Fritsch "the most important wisdom book from Egypt now available is **Teaching of Amen-em-ope** written after the 8th century B C " (IB 767).

In the above Babylonian and Egyptian works, there are numerous examples of similarities of thought and expression which get reflected in **Proverbs** 22:17-24:22. With the striking exception of just seven verses, the rest of the twenty-seven verses bear a striking resemblance and have their recognizable counterparts in the Egyptian Books of Wisdom (IB 768).

The following pairs of couplets can be cited, for instance. The first pair are nothing but simple and straightforward exhortation:

Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise,
And apply your mind to knowledge. (P22:17);
Give thine ear and hear what I say,
And apply thine heart to apprehend
(**Amen-em-ope**).

The following couplets bear a sociological message:

Do not rob the poor, because he is poor,
or crush the affected at the gate. (P22:22);
Beware of robbing the poor
And of oppressing the afflicted
(**Amen-em-ope**).

It seems generally that Israel was a debtor in this regard, although one must not overlook the possibility that P22:17 - 23:14 as a unit, was in existence in Israel, long before its incorporation in the present Hebrew book, and, consequently, it might have influenced the Egyptian scribe.

Moreover, it should be noted that whenever any foreign contribution was made, the Hebrew language and literature was sophisticated enough to assimilate and indigenize the borrowed material. As Charles T Fritsch rightly observes:

Regarding the whole problem of interaction between Israel and her surrounding neighbours,

> however, it can be said definitely that when Hebrews did utilise outside sources, they made them completely their own and transformed them into something much better (739).

With regard to the structure of the **Proverbs**, it should be readily admitted that it is wanting in terms of organization. There is not even a proper arrangement of themes in the book and, often, seemingly contradictory view points are presented side by side, pointing to its probable divergent origins in the ancient Hebrew oral tradition. However, in spite of all this, the import of its wisdom remains till today enormously profound, as Von Rad has rightly remarked: "The ethos of Proverbial wisdom originates from a knowledge which is wholly accessible to man " (**Wisdom in Israel**, 95).

Tirukkural, the Tamil work of wisdom, according to scholars like G.U.Pope, reflects "the moral influence of the East and the West which have always influenced one another in a very profound sense over the ages " (**Tirukkural**, 20).

With regard to the philosophic and theological systems in **Tirukkural**, various opinions have been expressed. To M.Poornalingam Pillai,

> The religion of **Tirukkural** is a standing puzzle. Tiruvalluvar bases morality upon theology. A good or evil action is a passport to heaven or hell. Even his invocation of the Supreme Being does not give us a clue to his religion .... His theology must therefore be only natural theology and his religion only natural religion (1).

On the other hand, G.U.Pope claims a significant Christian influence on Tiruvalluvar:

> It is undoubtedly a noteworthy fact that from Mylapore, on which the eyes of Christendom have rested as the sacred spot in India of Apostolic labour, comes the original book, much of its teaching is an echo of the Sermon on the Mount (**Tirukkural** 20).

If Dr.G.U.Pope hears echoes of the Sermon on the Mount in **Tirukkural**, scholars belonging to other sects try to interpret Tiruvalluvar's verses in a manner that would eventually point to **Tirukkural**'s origins in the direction of a particular ethnic or religious group, to which their own ancestors belonged. For instance, Thiru V.Kalyanasundaranar says

> Valluvar's work has its basis the **Dharmā** of Jainism. Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai, a great

research scholar in Tamil observes that such descriptions as one finds about God in the chapter 'In Praise of God' lead one to conclude that Tiruvalluvar must have been a Jain (**Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar** 48).

Moreover, ethical prescriptions given to the ascetics such as non-killing, non-injuring, restraining the self from anger and temperance are the basic tenets of the Jains. "The Jain commentary on **Nīḷakkēsi-t-tiraṭṭu** of the 14th century openly speaks of **Tirukkural** as our authority" (5), indirectly ascribing to it certain unmistakable Jain traits.

Interestingly enough, the author of **Manimēkalai**, a distinguished Buddhist epic, quotes from **Tirukkural** and singles out Valluvar for a special word of praise, calling him 'poyyil pulavar', suggesting that Tiruvalluvar has embodied in his immortal work all the noble ideals of Buddhism.

Further, according to T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram, Vaishnavite Ālwars and **Tēvaram** writers liberally borrowed ideas and phrases from **Tirukkural.** Since Saivite philosophical works are replete with quotes from **Tirukkural**, to many Saivites,"it was their Saivite Bible " (**Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar** 5). Apart from all

these views, to the authors of **Tiruvalluvamālai** "**Tirukkural** is a summary of the Vedas" (T4,6,8)...6).

Tiruvalluvar's era, according to K.S.Ramasamy, is roughly the time when there were no fierce controversies raging in Tamil Nadu, between Hinduism on the one hand, and Buddhism and Jainism on the other:

> In as far as it is oriental, Tiruvalluvar's teaching is just such as the study of Hinduism in the light of Sankara's reforms combined with that of the Jain system in its later development and of the **Bhagavad Gīta**, might have produced (G.U.Pope, XXV).

Medieval commentators like Parimelazhagar and modern scholars and critics like Dr.S.Krishnasamy Ayyangar and V.R.Ramachandra Dikshitar, seem to hear in **Tirukkural**, echoes of Sanskrit or Vedic verses. Tiruvajravel Mudaliar, in particular, concludes that "the soul of the message of **Kural** is Saiva Siddhānta " (**Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar** 49).

Critics have often defined Tiruvalluvar's impact on the society in a larger context, far beyond the Tamil-speaking territories. For instance, Dr.B.Natarajan writes: "There is no resemblance between the basic economic ideas of Tiruvalluvar and Chanakya " (**Tmt. Sornammal Endowment Lectures** 61).

To T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram, **Tirukkural** is the highest watermark of the essential eclecticism of Tamil culture:

> The Tamilians of that age kept open their intellectual windows to light and air from all quarters of the world (**Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar** 9).

As K.Appadurai has rightly remarked:

> **Tirukkural** is universal in its outlook and it appears to bridge the gulf between all popular religious creeds-not merely ancient ones like Saivism and Vaishnavism of the Hindufold, but Buddhism, Jainism and Judaism of the ancient world and Christianity and Islam of the Middle Period (**The Mind and Thought of Tiruvalluvar** 4).

CHAPTER TWO

PROVERBS AND TIRUKKURAL AS WISDOM LITERATURE

The Book of Proverbs consists of nearly 3000 Proverbs, most of them by king Solomon; it also has an appendix of sayings of other wise men such as Agur and Lemuel. **Tirukkural** is a monumental work written in Tamil by Tiruvalluvar. It consists of 1330 terse, couplets. Dom Bernard Orchard makes an observation on the former work:

> **Proverbs** in **The Bible** is a human work written by men according to the current mode of literary expression and intended to be understood according to the rules of contemporary human language (**A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture** 9).

The Book of Proverbs belongs to the Wisdom Literature of Israel. Certain other texts in **The Bible** too may come under the same label in respect of their genre:

> To this literary genre also belong **Job**, **Ecclesiastes**, some of the **Psalms** in the **Old Testament**, **Ecclesiasticus** and the **Wisdom of Solomon** in the **Apocrypha** which form a great

> body of Wisdom Literature which existed throughout the Near East in the ancient times (**The Interpreter's Bible** Vol.IV 767).

Māshāl, the Hebrew title of **Proverbs**, according to Charles T.Fritsch, refers to an "ethical aphorism which is the product of the wiseman's consummate skill" (772). **Proverbs** consists of finely polished and succinctly worded ethical proverbs which are products of everyday language, fabricated on the basis of common human experience.

As regards **Tirukkural**, it is perhaps the most distinguished work in Tamil consisting of a number of purely didactic observations. N.Subramanian and R.Rajalakshmi make an insightful call for a comparison of the proverbs in Hebrew, Chinese and Tamil, underlining its generic significance:

> **Tirukkural** is in form and content proverbial and had better be treated on par with the Chinese and Hebrew Proverbial literature of the ancient times (**The Concordance of Tirukkural** 24).

The aim of this Chapter is to make an analogical study of the genre to which **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** belong, namely, the Wisdom tradition in ancient

literature which has won for these works universal approbation and admiration.

The Hebrew "hokmah" translated as "wisdom" meant initially, "the skill and competence of a craftsman such as that possessed by those who made Aaron's vestments. **Exodus** 23:3, or the Mosaic tabernacle **Exodus** 3:5." (**The Jerome's Biblical Commentary** 492).

R.N.Whybray remarks how "The Hebrew term 'hokmah' translated as 'wisdom', is represented in **Ecclesiasticus** and the **Wisdom of Solomon** as something more than an impersonal divine attribute, an attribute of God in His divine work of creation, and maintenance of the world to guide and instruct them and to confer God's gift on them " (**Wisdom of Proverbs**, 17).

In **Proverbs**, the idea of wisdom both as a human attribute and a divine gift, occurs frequently and is represented in the form of a person in a few passages of the opening nine chapters of the book. In a few other passages, for example **Job** 28, "wisdom" is deliberately objectified as an infinitely precious commodity:

> The price of wisdom is above rubies,
> The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it,
> Nor can it be valued in pure gold
>
> (**Job** 28: 18, 19).

There are certain verses in **Proverbs**, in which wisdom is represented also as a woman who stands in public places and declares that those who receive her instruction will find every kind of happiness and prosperity in life:

> She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors .... Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness (P8:3,18).

It is such a wisdom which confers on the rulers of nations, their authority and sagacity to rule over men, thereby almost enabling them to approximate the virtue of the Divine, for, after all, only God can lay claim to omnipotence and omniscience. Wisdom also makes an ontological claim that she is the first of God's creation, created even before the beginning of the world and a witness of all the acts of divine creation. In this context, Edgar B.Jones in **Proverbs and Ecclesiastes** observes,

> Wisdom included a knowledge of the mysteries of God as well as an understanding of the practical conduct that would bring a man prosperity and happiness (18).

The term 'wisdom' lends itself to various interpretations. Crawford H.Toy observes:

> Wisdom refers to the general expression for knowledge of all good things; it is practical sagacity, **Judges** 5:29; II **Samuel** 18:8; the skill of the artisan, **Exodus** 31:8; wide acquaintance with facts, I **Kings** 4: 29-34; learning, **Jeremiah** 8:9; skill in expounding secret things, **Ezekiel** 28:3; statesmanship, **Jeremiah** 18:18 and finally knowledge of the right living in the highest sense. The last virtue refers to the moral and religious intelligence (ICC 5).

Viewed from such a perspective, the religious element becomes practically identical with the moral.

The average Israelite used his reasoning power to understand the world around him. It was used at first in relation to certain aspects of life, concerning which, his religious teaching gave him no information or guidance. Knowledge thus acquired, based on actual life experience and observation, gave rise to the use of proverbial sayings including riddles and fables, their sole purpose being to establish rules for success in day-to-day life.

The proverbial sayings are mainly instructions with regard to life and conduct - transmitted from teacher to student, often in the form of a paternal

counselling. Their ultimate purpose was, according to Roland E.Murphy, "to train a worthy ruler and courtier, and the life setting is, clearly the royal court " (492).

According to Chambers' **Twentieth Century Dictionary**, wisdom means

> the ability to make right use of knowledge, saying or teaching (archaic); learning, skilfulness, speculation, spiritual perception.

Further, Wisdom Literature has also been defined by Roland E.Murphy as

> The writings of the ancient Middle East which consist of philosophical reflections of life or maxims and precepts about the right conduct of one's life (**The Jerome's Biblical Commentary** 492).

Israel was comparatively a very young nation among the many peoples who were responsible for producing the various cultures of the ancient Near East. For a long time, the Hebrews were strangers in their new land but as it became their home, over a period of centuries they formulated their own laws, some of which had originally come from the valley of Mesopotamia. Thus wisdom movement was essentially international in character.

Wisdom Literature, whether in Egypt, Babylon, or Israel, primarily divides itself into two kinds, prudential admonitions commonly in proverbial form that they may serve the young as guidelines for a happy and successful life on the one hand, and reflective essays on the meaning and significance of life, often presenting a pessimistic view, on the other.

J.Coert Rylaarsdam in **Revelation in Jewish Wisdom Literature** says, "Israel's Wisdom Literature is remarkably similar to that of Egypt and Babylon though produced much later" (6). The oldest collections of Hebrew wisdom are found in the **Book of Proverbs**, written by King Solomon whose wisdom "surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt" (**I Kings** 4:30).

Proverbs was also considered as utterances of men of wisdom. Sages were to be found not only in Egypt but also in Edom (**Jeremiah** 49:7), in Phoenicia (**Ezekiel** 28: 2,6), in Babylon (**Jeremiah** 50:35) and in Canaan (**Judges** 5:29). Doubtless it was in court circles, especially under Solomon who had such close ties with Egypt and Phoenicia, that Israel's wisdom movement began to flourish in a phenomenal fashion. Also politically, through his own marriage with a daughter of the Pharaoh,

Solomon was strongly oriented towards Egypt which possessed a long line of wisdom tradition.

In the words of Fuller C.Reginald, "The most striking point of contact between the extra-Biblical wisdom literature and **Proverbs** is to be found in a comparison of the Egyptian **Instruction of Amen-em-ope** inaccurately dated (1000-600 B.C.) with **Proverbs** 22: 1-24:22. Parallels have been noted with Arcadian and even Sumerian texts (**A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture** 501).

Similarities in thought and expression have been shown to exist between the **Wisdom of Ahikar**, an Aramaic collection of proverbs of Mesopotamian origin and the **Book of Proverbs**. But it is interesting to note that the wisdom literature was able to adopt itself to a more conscious selection of elements, peculiar to the culture of the Israelites. According to C.H.Toy,

> The Biblical Proverbs are expressions of the wisdom of God. They teach moral values, principles of practical living, warn against destructiveness of sin and encourage spiritual diligence (30).

Instruction is considered "the companion of wisdom" and the term "instruction" implies discipline of mind and heart that enables a man to keep himself under control.

Wisdom Literature may rightly claim for its goals, lofty ideals and a high moral purpose. Its primary goal is didacticism. In **Proverbs**, pragmatic instruction is given to any individual addressed in the work as 'My son' who is expected to heed the call of Wisdom. It is pertinent to observe here that the individualistic democratic approach is the peculiar characteristic of Israel's wisdom literature. In dealing with the challenges of everyday routine, it does not rely on any religion, creed or divine revelation, but bases all its knowledge on the cumulative human experience over the ages. There is very little in the world of human affairs that does not come under its critical scrutiny. It also draws many illustrations of practical sagacity from the world of Nature. The didactic works do not argue nor do they seek to provoke thought or resolve doubts. Their teaching is usually positive and authoritative. The human problem is seen as whole, and, in every situation, there is an option for the right and the wrong holding the potentials of profit or pain. As R.N.Whybray observes,

> As in Egypt, so in Israel, the wisdom books were at first used in the training of young men to become scribes .... It is generally recognized that the relatively highly organized Israelite state of monarchical times

> presupposes a more thorough system of education for its political leaders and administrative officers that could have been provided by the personal instruction of children by parents (**Wisdom in Proverbs**, 19).

Then there is the historic evidence that wise men were often called upon by the king and the court for counsel. Such wise men were mainly concerned with practical and philosophical matters. Since proverbs were written mainly for the purpose of instruction, often they are presented in an imperative form.

The Wisdom Literature of the **Old Testament** is clearly distinguished both in form and content from the other main kinds of Old Testament literature such as history, law, prophecy and psalms. Most of the other kinds of writing are firmly rooted in the specific religious tradition of Israel and are all exclusively concerned with its life and institutions. For instance, **Proverbs** says nothing about Israel, its history, political vicissitudes, peculiar status as the chosen people of God, cult, laws, priesthood or prophet. No stress is laid in the **Proverbs** on the ritualistic side of life like sacrifices and vows; the devotional aspects such as prayers, praise and reading the sacred books; or dogmas like monotheism, sin and salvation. On the

other hand, it stresses wise conduct or action which springs from insight and sagacity. At the centre of interest of the work remains the lonely human individual with his needs and ambitions, facing challenges in his inner world and those from the world outside.

Tirukkural, which has all along exercised an abiding authority on all major ethical subjects of the Tamil society over the past centuries, also belongs, in a general sense, to the instruction genre or wisdom literature. The literary form of **Tirukkural** is that of didactic or gnomic poetry. It consists, in the main, words of wisdom or instructions for the right conduct of the individual either as a householder, life companion, ascetic or ruler. In a short distich, as Wilber Owen Sypherd has put it, "It conveys moral truth in a concise and pointed form of instruction common in the early history of the East " (**The Literature of the English Bible** 180).

Didacticism is a vital component of Tamil Literature as the ancient Tamils had an abiding faith in the efficacy of virtues. They believed that an honest and disciplined soul is entitled to find delight and prosperity, not only in this life but in the life hereafter. Hence, **Aram** or virtue in **Tirukkural** has been visualized as a great power, embodying the ability to

reward the good and punish the wicked. For instance, a **Kural** states:

> As sun's fierce ray dries up the boneless things,
> So loveless beings [sic] virtue's power to nothing brings" (T.77)

It is such **Kurals** which make the German scholar Klaws observe, "The ancient Orientals were able to express the profound questions about human existence in Poetry" (**The Growth of the Biblical Tradition** 120). Certain elements of didactic or gnomic import in **Tirukkural** present close resemblances to **Proverbs**.

In Tamil Poetics, Tolkappiar's work on Grammar and Linguistics, one might safely presume, had been possible as early as 4th or 3rd century B C, simply because several generations of scholars and writers should have existed, before such an insightful and analytical classification of literary works could come into being.

In 'Sangam' literature (4th or 3rd century B.C to I or 2nd century A.D.), several sophisticated views on **Aram** or Virtue or Ethics or Morality were expressed by many scholars, sages and poets. According to T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram, "Tiruvalluvar is supposed to have lived in the closing decades of the Sangam, namely, the third century A D " (**Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar** 3). He is believed

to have lived in between the two great epochs in the history of the Tamils - the golden past of the Sangam Age prior to the 2nd century A.D. and the glorious future of the Pallava and Chola expansions. In between these great sagas, twilight seems to have descended on the life of the Tamils. Tiruvalluvar saw his own literary mission as redressing the lost balance, even as he felt the onus of guiding the citizens in the path of virtue and bringing about a spiritual renaissance, resting squarely on his shoulders in his capacity, as the leading Tamil writer of the Age. Not suprisingly, the momentum his great work gave to the evolution of the Tamil ethos continued for nearly a thousand years, until the last days of the medieval Chola power (i.e. 13th century A.D.). Tiruvalluvar's teachings were extremely popular at a time when nothing significant had taken place in Tamil history, comparable to the great Sangam Age. Thus **Tirukkural** came, in fact, as a response to the sociological, cultural and spiritual needs of the age. No wonder, the age saw the sudden blossoming of several works of ethical literature, including **Tirukkural**, all of which came to be called **Patineṉ Kīl Kaṇaku**, a collection of eighteen works on the ethics, supposed to govern the Tamils. **Tirukkural** is considered to be the best among them. In fact, it is the highest watermark

of the entire literary history and culture of the Tamils of all ages.

Tiruvalluvar is popularly believed to have created his *magnum opus* either in the decades following the Sangam Age, that is, 2nd century A.D., the Dark Age in Tamil literature, or immediately after. As some scholars have surmised, his teachings did go a long way in fulfilling the Tamil people's own inner needs and aspirations, and restoring the joy of living for the Tamils during the phase of the Pallava ascendancy. Tiruvalluvar is also presumed to have lived prior to the Kalabhra invasions who were not Tamil Kings, though they were virtually in command of the entire Tamil country between A.D.250 and A.D.600, a fact which impels B.Natarajan to comment: "Probably Tiruvalluvar intended his work as a note of warning and a general appeal to his countrymen to stir betimes and be up and doing something." (104).

The Tamil scholars of the time had divided their life into 'aham' ('inner' or 'private') and 'puram' ('outer' or 'public'). Stressing the significance of the above classification, many ethical works have been written, of which **Tirukkural** certainly towers as a masterpiece, which has few equals or parallels in history because every verse it presents is a short,

carefully chiselled out epigram, in the form of a neat couplet.

With regard to the couplet form adopted by Tiruvalluvar, K.D.Tirunavukkarasu comments, "Probably the Tamil sage adopted it as being the best representative in Tamil Sloka" (**Tirukkural Nīti Ilakiam**, 1). The terse and pregnant brevity of the couplet lends a peculiar rhetorical tone and a thematic focus to each of the **kurals**.

The primary goal of any wisdom literature, obviously, is didacticism. The thematic structure of such a literature should be founded on the bedrock of worthy values and noble ideals. Beyond any shade of doubt, **Tirukkural** fulfils such a role in this regard, for it inspires every one who comes under its sway, to aspire for the highest of goals possible for any individual, by laying down highly ambitious ethical standards. Further, there is clarity and simplicity in respect of its exposition, in whatever aspect of life Tiruvalluvar dwells on, as he is quite earnest that people share his insights and concerns in their day-to-day life, which are based on his own observation, experience and knowledge.

Without making much ado about the sentiments and surface feelings of the human mind, Tiruvalluvar

arranges his pronouncements on ethics, mostly in terms of a cause-and-effect order. He accords a high priority to ideas as well as the medium through which they have to flow, rather than to refinement of feeling and imaginative embellishments. However, this historic work can also boast of distinct chapters which pay special attention to martial temper and heroic feelings, like **Padaicherukku** (military spirit); **Nalkuravu** (poverty) and inhibited sensuality in **Kāmatupal** (Romantic Phase).

Tiruvalluvar is concerned with ethics which hold a beaconlight to the young as well as to the old. He underlines the needs of ethics for the individual, primarily in terms of personal virtues and ethics in the context of society and polity. Thus, genre-wise, **Tirukkural** does belong to wisdom literature as it embodies the essential principles and duties of an individual in the context of a specific society, executed in the form of pithy, rhythmic couplets which can be easily committed to memory. The telling mode of its expression and mnemonic idiom vouch for the fact that the entire work has flowed from the quill of one and the same person, by the sheer strength of their consistent intellectual virtuosity. Despite the severe handicap imposed by the structure of the couplet, a relatively cryptic medium, consisting of words and images of unusual opacity, Tiruvalluvar's ideas have

ultimately found a fluent expression and an instant rapport with several generations of readers, often charming the literary connoisseurs among them with a rare foresight and clarity of vision.

Development of the individual is **'sine qua non'** of human civilization, and the factors which contribute to the development of harmony and integration within the individual, the family and community and the world at large, all stem from the acquisition of essential wisdom, which, in its turn, derives its strength and meaning from a cogent and consistent ontological relationship with the Divine manifesting itself, often, through human insight into the socio-political relations and a certain intuitive or metaphysical vision. Often, the individual's ethics depends very much upon the needs of his society and it is the community that frames a complex of values and code of conduct for every individual to imbibe within himself, a fact which explains the temporal nature of all codes of behaviour. The teachers of wisdom focus their attention, however, on a much larger context than do the average individuals, and hence the greater relevance and validity of their pronouncements in respect of theology, sociology, ethics and politics.

Judaism is as ancient as Hinduism and both the ancient Israelites of Babylon and Mesopotamia and the Indians were nomads and this probably resulted in the similarities in their general attitudes to life and customs and social practices. For instance, Suguna Deva Sundaram, in her book on Anthropology, highlights the out-of-door nature of existence of the ancient communities where the males had a more prominent role to play, by virtue of their superior physical strength:

> The perception of God mainly as male, the allocation of priestly functions to man, the male domination in religious and secular life, the practice of sacrificing birds and animals in the temple, composing hymns to adore the Heavenly Being and writing out the salient features of their pilgrimage seemed very much alike. These aspects have continued largely unchanged (**Roots of Suppression of Women in India** 37).

The Hebrew ontology of the divine was rigorously monotheistic and definitive, and hence from the point of view of its uncompromising tenets, any tendency towards secularization was looked upon as utterly untenable as it would be tantamount to an implicit compromise of faith in Yahweh's power. However, the lifestyle that **Proverbs** fashions out, depends abundantly on a healthy

respect for an omnipotent and all-sufficient God who sustains and preserves all.

Thus wisdom in **Proverbs** is not only uncompromisingly God-centred in its essence but also asserts God's mastery over the entire humanity. He is not simply the Lord who led the chosen people of Israel out of Egypt but the One who manifested Himself as the Universal Lord. In the words of John J.Collins, "He is not the God of Israel alone but of all humanity, and is in principle accessible to all" (36). Thus, in a significant contrast to the books of Prophets, Wisdom Books of the Bible seldom speak about the special dealings of God with Israel.

As regards **Tirukkural**, Tiruvalluvar also believes in the eternal Primal Deity, who is the Alpha of Creation, the very first element of the entire universe. God to him, in short, is the first essence, the basic premise or the 'centre' in the system of all ethics and moral codes:

> A, as its first of letters, every speech maintains;
> The 'Primal Deity' is First through all the world's domains (T 1)

This text suggests a definition of God closely akin to the theological "Word" in **St. John: 1:1:** "In the

beginning was the Word; the Word was with God; And the Word was God."

G.U.Pope translates "Āṭi Bhagavan" as the "eternal, adorable one", while Beski interprets it as "leader". K.C.Kamaliah in his preface to the **Kural** simply remarks: "The world has God as its head."

In this context, it will be only proper to remind ourselves of the fact that in Tolkappiar's age, people worshipped assorted deities assigned to the different **tinai**, that is, classification of literary works along the lines of the different kinds of **land**, such as desert, fertile land, jungle, etc. The Tamils believed in the multifarious manifestations of the Divine, ranging from obvious natural elements like fire to the hallowed, heroic ancestors such as Rama. The definition made in terms of **tinai** was surely quite prevalent till the period of **Silappatikāram**, according to Kamatchi Srinivasan, who goes on to point out: "However, Tiruvalluvar, as a monotheist, never alludes to such a custom." (1975, 7).

The wisdom writer simply highlights the fact that the Lord is the Creator of the Universe. In **Proverbs** 8: 27-31, Wisdom traces its origin or existence to a time before God created the earth, fields, plateaux and mankind. He also endowed Man with physical strength and

power of the senses: "The hearing ear and seeing eye: The Lord has made them both" (P20:12). "The rich and the poor meet together. The Lord is the maker of them all" (P22:2).

Also, God is defined in the wisdom works in terms of his omniscience: "The hearts of the children of men are before the Lord" (P15:1); "Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own ways?" (P20:24). Thus God is described as the Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent Being.

Tiruvalluvar also emphasizes God's unlimited superiority and power over man and the universe almost in similar terms. He is variously described as "the Disposer of all things" (T 377) and "Assigner of human destiny" as implied in "He that shaped the world" (T 1062).

It is significant that Tiruvalluvar does not attribute any anthropomorphic emotive qualities or disposition to the divine Creator in **Tirukkural**. To him, the Creator is an inexorable Being whose vicissitudes and states of mind, if He has any, are utterly beyond the comprehension of man. On the other hand, the Wisdom writer does refer to various

anthropomorphic reflections or responses to the Divine Being such as His possible likes and dislikes, pleasure and displeasure.

To the wisdom writer, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (P9:10), and "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (P1:7). As pointed out in the **Family Devotional Study Bible**, these verses suggest "a good relationship with God, based on reverence and respect for Him and His commands" (547). To Goodman, it is "Obedience to God; trying to carry out His will in everything one does" (85). It even implies "hatred of evil" (P8:13). Man's express dependence on someone greater than himself is the very foundation of wisdom, which consists in the shrewd and sound handling of one's affairs in complete submission to His will. That such an absolute trust is demanded of man in the Wisdom Books can be seen from the following verses:

> Trust in the Lord with all thy heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths (P3:5,6).

Further, God is also defined as the Prime Source of wisdom: "The Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." (P2:6).

Tiruvalluvar calls God simply 'Vālarivan', interpreted by Parimelazhagar as a "Person of pure wisdom and pure intelligence"(T.2). G.U.Pope alludes to Him as "The Purely Wise One":

> No fruit have men of all their studied lore
> Save they the' Purely Wise One's feet adore.
> (T 2).

The Wisdom writer goes on to enumerate the following blessings as rewards for the man who has such a reverential "fear" of God. It "prolongs his days" (P10:27): "provides confidence to his children" and offers him "a place of refuge", "which enables him to depart from the snares of Death" (P14:25,26). Moreover, "he shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil" (P19:23). It will also give him "riches, honour and life." (P22:4).

In striking contrast to the repeated emphasis of "fear" for the Lord in the Jewish Wisdom Book, **Tirukkural** observes a profound silence. Instead, the Tamil wisdom work suggests a certain interpersonal intimacy and mutual accountability on the part of the individual devotee and the Creator, whose 'feet, who o'er the full-blown flower hath past', who gain. In bliss long time shall dwell above this earthly plain "

(T.3). The one who has triumphed over his senses and found the abode in Him shall prosper:

> Long live they blest, who have stood in path from falsehood freed;
> His, "who quenched lusts that from the sense-gates five proceed " (T.6).

Such an individual who has merged himself with God will be rid of all fear and

> "His foot" to which none can compare', men gain,
> "'Tis hard for mind to find relief from anxious pain " (T 7).

These **Kurals** make an ontological attempt to define the superiority of the Divine Essence over man, highlighting the former's purity, desirelessness, temperance and power.

With regard to Tiruvalluvar's concept of God, T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram is of the following view: "The emphasis on all these suggestive descriptions is on God being the very basis of the world, on His perfect qualities, on His unsullied glory, on His kindness and **Dharmā**, or the path of goodness, wherein selfishness has no place. His conception of God is related to the conception of **Dharmā** in its wider aspect" (85). The

final goal of all beings is freedom from pain, illusion and **Karma**. It is, in short, an eternal life weaned away from the endless, successive births and it is such a reward that Tiruvalluvar's Divine One offers to his true devotees. This, in fact, is not far removed from the vision presented by the Wisdom writer who also stresses God's omniscience and omnipotence: "The lot is cast into the lap but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (P16:33). "The horse is prepared against the day of battle but safety is of the Lord" (P21:3).

However, an essential difference between the author of the **Proverbs** and Tiruvalluvar is that while the former "stresses the seminal essence of the Divine in the process of creation of everything that is good", Tiruvalluvar makes a much taller claim for man's innate potential:

> He who toils hard can even subdue fate; Though
> fate divine should make your labour vain
> Effort its labour's sure reward will gain
> (T619)

God, to the author of **Proverbs**, is, above all, a lover of justice and fairplay, and hence, is constantly engaged in an act of monitoring: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the good and the bad" (P15:3). This verse has been interpreted in the

following manner with a pronounced stress on divine judgement by Charles T.Fritsch: "God is in His watch tower keeping watch over the good and the bad and this is really a warning that God will punish the wicked and of course reward the righteous." (P868). In this context, the Wisdom writer obviously stresses predestination: "A righteous man's heart has many plans but the Lord directs his steps." (P16:9).

It is interesting to observe here that, in terms of pure philosophical formulation of the conflict between predestination and free will on the part of the human individual, both the writers pit the same metaphysical and dialectical entities against each other.

Further, it is all the more intriguing to find that both the writers are equally equivocal and paradoxical, as far as their final pronouncements on the subject of the Divine Being are concerned. Perhaps it is impossible for any human intellect to probe into the source and nature of the power of predestination on the one hand, and the conditions defining the exercise of the principle of free will on the other, beyond a point, in view of the fact that the human span of life and the capacity for vision are limited. Nevertheless, powerful intellectuals and seers like these wisdom writers strain their utmost intellectual and intuitive energy in order

to find the relative strength of two modes concerning dispensation of human affairs on earth, namely, predestination and free will and in the process of applying one or the other mode to the question of life's ultimate meaning, reach, at length, their limits, and are compelled to resort to equivocation or an inevitable paradox, as their findings in the final analysis are far too complex to warrant any naive or simple linguistic formulations.

The Hebrew Wisdom writer is of the view that man is created with a purpose and all human affairs are controlled by God who is very much at the 'centre':

> The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole decision of it is from Yahweh (P16:33).

The method of determining the divine will through the casting of lots was probably universal, not particularly confined to Judaism or Hinduism in the ancient world. In the **Old Testament** times, decisions on important public and private affairs were taken, ostensibly, with divine approbation. Further, the procedure adopted was mostly casting of lots.

For instance, in the place of Judas Iscariot, the eleven disciples of Jesus proposed two names - Joseph called Barsabas and Matthias, and prayed to God. Then

they cast lots and the lot fell on Matthias, and thus he was numbered with the eleven apostles." (Acts 1:26).

The term 'lot' was treated almost as synonymous with one's part or portion. Since human life is totally controlled by God, man is expected to acknowledge, obey and trust God and allow Him to control all his decisions. Even kings cannot exempt themselves from such a divine ordering of things, for "No human wisdom can avail against Yahweh" (P21:30).

Victory or defeat in battle is decided by God, in spite of human arrangements and expectations or fears: Moreover, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will " (RSVP 21:1).

In these words of the author of **Proverbs**, the sovereignty of God expresses its authority through the disposal of the ways of human individuals, as God not only determines the events of a man's devices but every step in his progress. In fact, this divine purpose works through every human activity and God is infinitely stronger than man. For instance, it is the sovereign pleasure of God that decides whether a person should be prosperous or poor. However, curiously enough, according to the Wisdom writer, the providence of God does not interfere with the free will of rational man.

Hence, he exhorts the reader "to commit our works unto the Lord and our thoughts shall be established" (P3:3). According to George Lawson, "divine wisdom of God does not interfere with the free will of a rational creature" (234). True faith, in the opinion of some critics, means implicit, unquestioning submission to God's omnipotence. As Dake puts it, "True religion consists of full acknowledgement of God in all human affairs" (642).

Tirukkural, on the other hand, does not dwell elaborately on the dialectical issue over God's predeterminism or on the free will of man. To Tiruvalluvar, man, on the whole, is either reaping the benefits of good deeds he has done in his previous birth, or paying the penalty for the errors of his past. In short, **Tirukkural** presents human life on earth itself as almost like a phase of judgement calling forth retribution or reward. This is in sharp contrast to the teleological vision of the **Proverbs** which presents human life as something whose merit is yet to be judged.

Proverbs presupposes a teleological order in human life, underlining the necessity for the individual's self-discipline, for the sake of the establishment and the preservation of the social order. It presents the universe as created with a predetermined purpose. Though God has implanted in all men, a knowledge of the

right and the wrong, in most, such a knowledge is defunct. Hence the emphasis in the work is on the need for a God-centred life: "To fear the Lord is to hate evil" (P8:13). There are also further exhortations for righteous living which entails not only earthly returns but divine blessings, as can be seen in the following verses: The rewards for doing good are God's gift of "sound wisdom" (P1:7); "stability" (P10:25); "deliverance from trouble and death" (P11:4, 11:8 and 11:21) and, above all, "eternal life" (P10:16, P11:28 and P14:32).

God is capable not only of supplying all the temporal needs of the righteous, but punishing the wicked by undermining their wealth and strength: "He will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish, but he casteth away the substance of the wicked (P10:3). Thus, the entire creation is founded on the conviction of a superhuman, divine justice.

Proverbs also anticipates a scheme of things in which each individual plays a crucial role. It is God who provides security and stability to the righteous by ensuring a long and blessed life for them on the earth: "The righteous shall flourish as a branch and he shall be recompensed in the earth" (P11:28 & P11:31); "The root of the righteous shall not be moved" (P12:3), and

"the house of the righteous shall stand" (P12:7). "As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more; but the righteous is an everlasting foundation" (P10:25). Those who obey God are entitled to divine protection: "A good man is delivered from death and trouble" (P11:3) & (P11:8). However, life on earth is not a bed of roses for the righteous all the way either. At times, they too may have to undergo pain and suffering, though overall divine protection is assured to them. That the righteous do undergo spells of suffering can be deduced from verses such as the following:

> Behold the righteous will be punished on earth.
>
> How much more the wicked and sinner? (P11:31),

Prof. Toy interprets the above verse as "he who sins even a little will be punished, and he who sins much will receive greater punishment." (213).

Tiruvalluvar also explains how righteous life is to be based on the principle of **Aram** or righteousness through a consistent practice of virtues which makes life more meaningful. The attainment of God-realization is possible only through self-realization on the part of a pure and disciplined soul. It is through human realization of values of Goodness, Truth and Justice that divinity is affirmed. Prof. Toy observes, "Human

relationships are based on moral laws of Truth and Goodness sustained by love and justice. It is those cardinal virtues which contribute to the cultural life of the people." (160).

The term "wicked" is employed in **Proverbs** as a general term for those who discard and disobey the divine law designed in wisdom. The man of evil devices may prosper for a time but he shall not be established by wickedness: "The wicked shall be cut off from the earth and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it" (P2:22); "The candle of the wicked shall be put out" (P24:20).

Moreover, **Proverbs** warns of death for the unjust: "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing but righteousness delivereth from death" (P10:2). Prof. Toy translates the above verse in the following manner: "Violence and injustice are sure to bring divine or human vengeance on man's head. Justice, on the other hand, by avoiding such vengeance secures to its possessor, a long and peaceful life, exemption from premature death, which is regarded in **Old Testament** as a direct divine judgement"(199). In short, God metes out due reward to everyone both in the land of the living and that of the dead, in accordance with the deeds

performed by the individuals during their sojourn on earth.

In contrast, unlike **Proverbs**, **Tirukkural** talks of rewards and punishments purely in a frame of temporal consequences, implying successive births in tune with the Hindu thought. According to Tiruvalluvar, a man is either reaping the benefits of his good deeds in his previous birth or paying the penance for his misdeeds in the past. It should also be stressed here that Tiruvalluvar has an abiding faith in the doctrines of **Karmā** and rebirth.

Karmā means primarily 'action'. In general terms, it seems to vindicate the law of cause and effect, applied to all human activities pertaining to body, mind and spirit. Nevertheless, oriental scholarship, in respect of the doctrine of **Karmā**, relates it to its inevitable dimensions of spirituality. According to Sri Satchithanandam Pillai, "Action done with attachment produces a relation but non-attachment to action,frees the soul from contact of the effect of that action" (**Saiva Siddhanta Lecture** 14).

Thus to a Hindu, birth is neither just an accident, nor a totally new beginning but the consequence of a complex of the individual's past deeds. In the words of N.Subramaniam, "Each person's present condition is the

result of only his or her own past deeds" (**History of Tamil Nadu** 64).

Another interesting point that distinguishes the works discussed here is the prominence accorded to Fate in the Tamil work. Tiruvalluvar, being a typical oriental thinker, can never for a moment, ignore the omnipotence of Fate in human existence:

> What powers so great as those of Destiny? Man's skill
> Some other thing contrives: But fate's beforehand still (T 380).

Tiruvalluvar also takes cognisance of the resultant effects of the destined acts of commission and omission, committed in the former births of the individuals as implied in the following couplet:

> Even those who gather together millions will only enjoy them as it has been determined by the Disposer of all things (T1 377).

Karmā does include in its broad embrace of implicit meanings, moral consequences of the individual acts which ought to be circumscribed in a scheme of things, under a God-centred dispensation. It operates on a moral plane, meting out rewards and penalties, primarily through "the form of births". The practical and social concern of the doctrine seems to have been to

infuse into the common man, a sense of resignation to the present, for the sake of his inner psychological stability while implanting in him at the same time, a perpetual nervous concern about the hereafter, so that he would conduct his affairs in a manner acceptable and beneficial to society.

All the sufferings in the world inflicted on an individual at birth are attributed to his evil deeds in the past. As Tiruvalluvar says

> The fruit of virtue need not be described in books; it may be inferred from seeing the bearer of a palanquin and the rider therein (T1 137).

and,

> The wise will say that men of diseased bodies, who live in degradation and in poverty, are those who separated the life from the body of animals in a former birth (T1300).

In order to evade the wrath of fate, Tiruvalluvar cautions men to cling fast to God who is far above all desires, and to rise above all earthly attachments for their own spiritual good. In this context, it may be appropriate to quote G.U.Pope's elegant version of the **Kural**, despite the poetic license indulged in at the close of the couplet:

Desire the desire of Him who is without desire.

In order to renounce desire, desire that desire (T.350).

Though Tiruvalluvar does underscore the inexorable nature of Fate time and again, he does not belittle the virtue of human endeavour in manipulating the course of **karmā**. It is perhaps Tiruvalluvar's wish that man should aspire to thwart the course of Fate itself, through his strenuous efforts as an individual. Man may even become the architect of his own fortune; for sustained and courageous human effort of mind and spirit may outwit even the might of Fate:

Who strive with undismayed unfaltering mind
At length shall leave the opposing Fate behind (T 620).

According to this **kural**, it is human ingenuity that overcomes the course of **Karma**, despite the part played by determinism.

If **Tirukkural** presents the Supreme Being as an undefinable and impersonal God who remains simply a Philosophical Absolute, in **Proverbs** the Supreme Being is presented as an omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God, who is yet a Personal Being, interested and involved in the affairs of every individual.

With regard to the Divine Personality of God, the Jewish Wisdom Book describes Him as the Creator who is also the ultimate Disposer of things. His all-seeing eyes monitor and weigh all the deeds of men and weigh all their intentions. Also, He looks for an uncompromising kind of conformity on the part of man, to a highly demanding ethical code, and takes delight only in a man who is perfectly upright. Any trace of offensive behaviour on the part of man is utterly abhorrent to Him. Thus, the Jewish sages affirm their faith in monotheism. **Proverbs** therefore, highlights the justice and power of God's dispensation in the world and His affirmation of an ethical code, perfectly in tune with a logo-centric vision.

It is remarkable that for an oriental thinker who lived in a land that worshipped literally countless deities of her pantheon, Tiruvalluvar states his faith simply in the 'Alpha' of creation, who constitutes the basic premise in the system of ethics and the prime source of wisdom. The Hebrew tradition, on the other hand, sees wisdom as an impersonal divine attribute which manifests itself through human insights into earthly experiences.

In **Proverbs**, Wisdom is conceived of as "a woman who has erected her house with seven pillars" (P9:1),

where the inexperienced can find shelter. That such a Wisdom provides a source of instruction for the individual soul, can be seen from the reference that Wisdom has set up a permanent establishment in which, she is at all times to entertain all who come to her (C.Bridges 625).

D.B.Orchard sees in the above verse, an instance of

> Objective Wisdom which emanates only from God. It is the moral law which is an emanation of the essential holiness and justice of God which makes itself heard by the voice of conscience and also embraces the preaching of God's ministers and speaks and acts with divine authority (476).

Tirukkural, equally didactic, popularly seen among the Tamils as "Ulagappotumarai" (The common global Scripture) is a comprehensive code of ethics which devotes to **'Aram'**, **Dharmā** or virtue of the individual and his role in society, thirty-eight chapters consisting of 380 couplets.

T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram makes the following observation in the light of the philosophy of Tiruvalluvar:

> The perfect men, the sages and seers are the embodiments of Dharmā and expound that Dharmā

> by every conduct of theirs .... The term "aram" refers not only to all the groups of missionaries especially Buddhists, Jains and Sanyasins in the Sangam Tradition but also to those who have undertaken the duty of **Dharmā**. They are the standing paragons to be followed by those desirous of Virtue. The virtuous are called "Antanar" (a personification of divine virtue) in a genuine sense because in their conduct towards all creatures, they are clothed in kindness (**The Philosopy of Tiruvalluvar** 39).

The above critic interprets "Antanar" further as

> those of cool and beautiful nature, i.e. the people of kindness who live according to their ideal of being upright and kind to every living being (47).

Dharmā is defined as a disposition that knows no envy, greed, anger or bitter words. Hence, **Aram** refers to moral laws which can be summed up in the following single commandment:

> Spotless be thou in mind, this only merits virtue
> All else, mere pomp of idle sound, no real worth can claim (T34).

Through **Aram**, Tiruvalluvar emphasizes also purity of the intellect which "consists in the absence of "avā" or the hankering after pleasures of selfish life"(TRM 42) Thus, **Dharmā** ultimately implies purity of mind, thought and conduct.

Further, **Aram** signifies good deeds. Goodness of nature is the best virtue in man as it is a divine quality. If a man sacrifices himself and suffers for others, he possesses a divine spirit within him which endows him with a certain higher realization of happiness:

> What form virtue floweth yieldeth dear delight,
> All else extern is void of glory's light (T 39).

Thus the primary concern of king Solomon and of Tiruvalluvar are man as an individual and man in society, rather than man as belonging to a particular nation or religion. This is illustrative of the fact that these teachers of wisdom have transcendent goals before them, irrespective of race and religion. As Edgar Jones remarks,

> The maxims and insights of the wisdom teachers apply to the experiences of every man in all

> lands and nations. They represent the accumulated experience of the ordinary man (27).

Further, Humanism and individualism are doctrines emanating from a growing sense of reality whose truth is perceived by ordinary men and women. To the Israelite sage, virtue is logo-centric. As the existence and providence of God are affirmed in the Wisdom works, so is the existence of a moral framework for man's action.

In a sense, both king Solomon and Tiruvalluvar can be easily perceived as masters of wisdom literature at a transcendent, global level. In the **Bible**, king Solomon is readily recognized as a direct agent of the Divine author of the Holy Scriptures, for St. Paul says "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (I.Timothy 3:16). On the other hand, Tiruvalluvar has carved a niche for himself as a law-giving sage in the popular imagination of the Tamils, and a profound poet of **Man**-centred wisdom.

Austen Warren's observation in **Theory of Literature** seems to be pertinent with regard to the sources of inspiration in **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural**:

> Inspiration, the traditional name for the unconscious factor in creation is classically

associated with the Muses ... and in Christian thought with the Holy Spirit (86).

Tirukkural contains in a nutshell, the quintessence of the **Vedas** and Indian Philosophy and the social and cultural code of the Tamils. Acknowledging the great value of wisdom as expressed in the couplets of Tiruvalluvar, Albert Schweitzer says:

> There hardly exists in the literature of the world a collection of maxims with such lofty wisdom (200).

Yogi Suddhananda Bharathi, the great religious pandit and scholar, points out the greatness of **Tirukkural** in the following manner:

> **Tirukkural** is a guiding light to humanity, It leads humanity to live as it ought to live in moral pursuits, spiritual knowledge, eternal wisdom in perfect health, wealth and prosperity (22).

While recognizing the God-centredness in **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural**, it should also be stressed that the visions of Solomon and the Tamil spiritual writer have a direct bearing on the pragmatic issues of daily living. Even ancient writers like Horace, have seen the vital connection between poetry and the daily, dull routine of human life. The experienced poet as an imitative artist

can look only to human life and character for inspiration to create his models and derive from them, a language that is authentic and relevant. In the process of distilling truth from the life around them the artists tend to achieve transcendence through the "shape" or "form" of their arts, which Weisstein refers to as "gestalt".

Both the works under discussion here expound profound issues relating to human existence and are explicitly didactic. Both stress the need for practising God-centred ethical values for leading a good and profitable life on earth with a transcendent goal. Their spiritual recognition of a God-oriented life reinforces the value of the ethics they advance and their preoccupation with pragmatic wisdom makes them eminently comparable with each other on a thematic level and hence a full-length comparative study of the works concerned has been undertaken here, in order to define the finer aspects of each work in terms of the other.

CHAPTER THREE

ETHOS OF FAMILIAL BONDS

This chapter attempts to show how both **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural**, despite their disparate origins, are deeply indebted to the collective wisdom of the societies in which they were fashioned. Both the wisdom works concern the affairs of ordinary householders and not ascetics, for marriage is assumed as the norm in both the works. They seek also to establish certain viable parameters in social behaviour in order to ensure the vital bonds that exist within a family, enjoyable, meaningful and rewarding.

Every society formulates some code of ethical conduct or other of its own, and sets it up, often, in accordance with the needs of its own times. Quite often, it is the underlying ethical principle that validates the creative process of a work of art, which, in its turn, tends to regulate the social code, thus relating mundane life to some form of Dharmā or virtue. The value of ethical ideas has been recognized in ample measure,by scholars and thinkers like T.H.Huxley:

> No human being or society composed of human beings ever did or ever will come to much unless their conduct is governed and guided by

> the love of some ethical idea (**The Cultural Heritage**, Vol.II 496).

However, it should be recognized that the moral or ethical element in a work of art need not be logo-centric. According to Philip Sidney,

> Poetry is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word 'Mimesis', that is to say, a representing counterfeiting or figuring forth, to speak metaphorically; a speaking picture with this end to teach and delight. (**An Apologie for Poetrie** 10).

However, in C.H. Toy's view, ethics are God-centred:

> The moral content of life is based not on ritual and ecclesiastical law but on reason and conscience and these are the gifts of God (**The International Critical Commentary on Proverbs**, 35).

In respect of genre and vision, **Proverbs** may be described as a manual of conduct or as Bruch puts it "an anthology of gnomes" (quoted in **The International Critical Commentary** 10), in the sense of a collection of pithy and sententious sayings in verse, embodying some moral sentiment or precept. It is needless to stress here once again, the fact that the vision of **Proverbs** is logo-centric.

In fact, the entire **Old Testament** is the product of certain sociological conditions prevalent amongst the Jews and the Jewish notions of theology. As Arthur Buttrick observes,

> The ethic of the **Old Testament** is based not on a philosophical or theoretical system but on the tradition of both Israel and Canaan, on the sociological necessities of the people on the personal religious experience of the leaders (66).

We can trace the Israelite wisdom back to the very early phase of David's reign, long before king Solomon gave it the immense stimulus of his own genius, and to the inflow of foreign talent, for, according to recorded history, there were permanent counsellors at the court of king David. (I **Chronicles** 27:32, 33)

Old Testament frequently refers to the other recorded, often collective, wisdom of Israel's neighbours, particularly those of Egypt (I **Kings** 4:30); Edom and Arabia (**Job** 1:3); Babylon (**Daniel** 1:4) and Phoenicia (**Ezekkiel** 28:3).

The critical contention that **Proverbs** has made use of **Amen-em-ope**, the Egyptian source of collective ethical wisdom, has now been increasingly recognized. According to Derek Kidner,

> An 'Ostracon' in the Cairo museum containing an extract from the Teaching seems to show that **Amen-em-ope** must be dated well before the time of Solomon. In Israelite terms, these dates mean the days of the Judges or Moses (**Proverbs**, 24).

In reality, **Proverbs** may be considered as, at least partially, a recipient of the ancient wisdom of Egypt and other neighbours of Israel, but even such a borrowing can be described by no means as slavish. In the words of Derek Kidner, "these Egyptian jewels ... have been reset to their advantage by Israelite workmen and put to finer use." (24).

As for **Tirukkural's** stature among the world's great collections of ethical works, there can be no two opinions. That **Tirukkural** is comparable to scriptures at the global level, has been pointed out by an eminent scholarly critic:

> **Tirukkural** is a world classic with which in perfection of form, profundity of thought, nobility of sentiment and earnestness of moral purpose, very few books outside the grand scriptures of humanity can at all be compared (V.V.S.Aiyar. 17).

If the above statement bears an eloquent testimony to **Tirukkural's** standing in the context of global literature, K.M.Munshi's words throw light on the fundamental reasons for the work's greatness:

> In its essence **Tirukkural** is a treatise **par excellence** on the art of living. Tiruvalluvar diagnoses the intricacies of human nature with such penetrating insight, perfect mastery and consummate skill, absorbing the most subtle concepts of modern psychology, that one is left wondering at his range and depth. His prescriptions, leavened by godliness, ethics, morality and humanness are sagacious and practical to the core (Foreword in C.Raja Gopalachari, **Kural: The Great Book of Tiruvalluvar** 3)

The unique greatness of both the works compared lies in the fact that they succeed, to a commendable degree, in blending earthly, materialistic goals in the most strikingly harmonious manner, with spiritual, and almost transcendent, perceptions and in continuing to exercise a tremendous influence on different generations and societies, regardless of the passage of centuries.

This chapter analyses the origin and significance of the terminology of 'Ethics' as a genre in classical

literature and studies the relevance of the application of such a generic term in respect of **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural**, when viewed against their respective backgrounds.

The term 'ethics' is derived originally from the Greek **'ethikos'** which means 'moral' and Latin **'ethos'** which signifies 'custom', behaviour and character, by which are implied the values and rules of conduct to be observed by an individual or a group of people:

> Ethics relates to a modifiable code of human behaviour. It is about the values and virtues one should cultivate (Arthur E.Holmes 10).

In the context of metaphysical analysis, a study of the ethics is directly related to a comparative definition of good and evil, with regard to a specific culture or community:

> Ethics is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with what is morally good and bad, right and wrong, a synonym for it is moral philosophy (**The Encyclopaedia Britannica** 977).

As a branch of knowledge, ethics is related also to social behaviour:

> Ethics is the science of morals, that branch of philosophy which is concerned with human

character and conduct (**Chambers' Twentieth Century Dictionary** 432).

In Greece, Socrates gave humanism a new set of co-ordinates, linking Man with the Eternal One. Boethius, who was profoundly influenced by Socrates, could find some true value in the individual, strictly in proportion to the consciousness of the divinity in the individual's self:

> He, who, leaving virtue, ceaseth to be a man, since he cannot be a partaker of the divine condition, is turned into a beast (**Consolation** IV 3) quoted in (**The Image of Man** 37).

Also Plato, the famous disciple of Socrates, speaks of the origin of ethics only in terms of the individual's rational ability to distinguish between good and evil and his concept of divinity:

> Rational knowledge, has as its object the objective reality of Forms and it is superior to sensation as the Forms are to sensibles [sic]. Moreover, it is the very fount of ethics: the rational knowledge of Forms becomes ultimately an apprehension of the culminative idea of the Good, the rational Creative Force of the universe, the basic

> Eternal Verity (**Republic** 505) (quoted in **The Image of Man** 39).

Without such a knowledge of the Good, Plato concludes, "any other knowledge or possession of any other kind will profit us nothing" (**The Republic** 505). And a knowledge of such a reality will inevitably involve a knowledge of right conduct.

According to Plato again,

> The highest wisdom is that of Forms which means that the peak of moral excellence is the contemplation of Ideas far above the ceaseless flux of sensation (40).

Very few men who manage to attain the knowledge of Forms are capable of a life of pure contemplation, and consequently, only such philosophers can enlighten mankind by their grasp of reality.

In more recent times, Walt Whitman has made the following observation in his "A Backward Glance over Travelled Road":

> The profoundest service that poems or other writings can do for their reader is not merely to satisfy the intellect or supply something polished and arresting; not even to depict great passions or persons or events but to

> fill him with vigorous, clean manliness and religiousness and give him good heart as a radical possession and habit. (**Leaves of Grass** 570).

Whitman obviously holds the view that Literature should uplift human soul and motivate it towards right goals. Elsewhere, Whitman refers to the great works of art in the following manner:

> Whenever claiming to be first class works, they are to be strictly and sternly tried by their foundation in and radiation in the highest sense and always, indirectly, of the ethic principle and eligibility to free, arouse and dilate. (420).

Two important approaches remain eminently available to all great artists and moralists in terms of goals visualized, namely, prescriptive and normative. Of these, it is the latter approach that aims at defining the goal or ideal through practical suggestions.

Somen Das, a modern thinker, talks of three kinds of ethical works: first, the deontological mode of moral thinking which has to do with duties to be observed and rules to be obeyed; second, the situational ethic, which is person-oriented and the third, the teleological mode which is primarily the end-, or goal-oriented.

As regards the Hindu ethical thought, it makes a significant emphasis on the deontological mode, in keeping with its teleological ends. Alasdair Mac Intyre observes:

> The Hindu seers visualize such a future that inspires and motivates the people of the present to subscribe to ethical action here and now (**A Short History of Ethics**, 6).

With regard to the ethical approach adopted in **The Bible**, it lays a tremendous stress on teleological goals:

> From the time of **Old Testament**, the patriarchs and prophets envisioned the future in terms of the Day of Judgement or the Day of the Lord. Indeed, futurity is fundamental to Jesus' message. **The Bible**, from the beginning to the end, is concerned with teleological and eschatological thinking (Mac Intyre 6).

Even Aristotle's explanation of the good as the aim and end of action is essentially teleological. In **Ethics**, for instance, he says,

> Every action and project seems to aim at some good and hence the good has been well defined as that at which everything aims (**Christian Ethics and Indian Ethics** 1).

As a work on ethics, **Proverbs** deals directly with the most fundamental moral goal of all, namely, "practical righteousness before God in every area of life" (**The Open Bible** 823). In fact, a great theologian defines **Proverbs** purely in terms of ethics: "A Proverb is a moral injunction which should rule man's conduct" (Ibid 500). Further, it is significant that the wise men dealing with "the practical problems of everyday life do not resort to any particular creed or revelation for their knowledge but simply to human experience in all its varied forms" (Charles T.Fritsch 776).

According to Roland W.Schloerb,

> Their main interest, however, is not the study of the universe and the laws which govern it but man and the moral conditions which govern his life. The purpose of these proverbs is to bring wisdom and understanding to man, so that they may live happily, peacefully and righteously together (IB 780).

Significantly, Tiruvalluvar's approach to moral doctrine is heavily influenced by a sound knowledge of human psychology and profound sympathy for human nature. The Tamil sage seems to have absorbed the essence of diverse religions and schools of philosophy of his time, and has made an attempt to formulate a pragmatic, and

yet, paradoxically enough, extremely idealistic goal before himself, which would remain eternally applicable and be utterly unfettered by the conditions of any particular country, culture or age. Tiruvalluvar is eminently normative in his approach, as he brings everything down to the level of practicality without ever losing sight of the ideal. Thus, the maxims prescribed in **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** presume the essential need for the establishment of happiness, security and success, in the life of an individual as well as the community as a whole.

It is also important to highlight at this point the fact that ethical philosophy remains, to a considerable extent, a criticism of prevalent opinions. Hence, it is pertinent here to analyse the causes and origins of ethical literature.

To arrive at a proper appreciation of any literary work, an understanding of the intellectual climate of the times of the author and his cultural environment, is extremely helpful.

As for the times of **Proverbs**, the age of Solomon is regarded by several critics including Derek Kidner as "the age of Cultural Development" (**Proverbs** 16). His court with official secretaries and chroniclers was modelled on those of Egypt and Tyre, where the Wisdom

Movement had been in vogue over a long period. Scholars acknowledge readily the fact that king Solomon was an indisputable monarch, presiding over a Golden Age of prosperity and culture. In fact, King Solomon was regarded as the patron of the Wisdom Movement in Hebrew Literature:

> Despite the royal and courtly origins of the movement, this genre of literature assumed a definite religious orientation from the very beginning (**The Open Bible** 500)

Modern scholarship also recognizes the collective Wisdom of the age, embedded in **Proverbs:**

> **Proverbs** may contain a very high proportion of matter originating outside Israel but it is saturated with Israelite theism and morality (501)

The monistic Jewish tradition inherited by Solomon and his father's firm faith in Yahweh, were primarily responsible for the kind of spiritual light that illumines the exceptionally brilliant insights proffered by **Proverbs**.

As regards the Age of Tiruvalluvar, the Tamil society and culture were in the process of transition, soon after the advent of the Aryans and their numerous, subsequent invasions. This was also the period when

Buddhism and Jainism enjoyed a stronghold in Tamil Nadu. This becomes evident from the fact that Tiruvalluvar addresses all his ethical pronouncements to a predominantly materialistic society of the Tamils. In fact, there were also certain other contemporary intellectuals in the Tamil society, who also recognized keenly the need for reviving an ethical tradition in society, like the authors of **Patinen̲ Kīl Kaṇakku** which consists of eighteen works, of which **Tirukkural** and **Nāladiār** are both eminent classical examples.

Tirukkural looks forward to the establishment of a peaceful, equitable and secure society which alone will ensure harmony and peace in any individual. On the other hand, the audience **Proverbs** addresses itself to, are not simply the Jewish nation alone, but the entire humanity. However, the implied listener in the work is called "My son", since the author of the aphorisms self-consciously prefers to assume a tone of authority throughout. Moreover, **Proverbs** aims at formulating an ideal or standard parameter, in respect of ethical values which, in their composite form, would constitute 'righteousness', which is clearly differentiated against certain other not-so-well-defined taboos.

Significantly enough, the ideal man as envisaged in **Proverbs** is not an anchorite or recluse, but a man who

enjoys fully his days of courtship and conjugal love, thoroughly capable of rejoicing in the happiness and laughter of his children. In the simple definition of C.Bridges, "such an ideal man is truly good and virtuous " (9).

First and foremost, the writer of **Proverbs** stresses the vital need for expression of love in human life, in the context of a predominantly materialistic and evil world. The wisdom writer seems to suggest only 'agape', the supreme kind of sacrificial love as the ultimate saving grace and solution for all the ills of humanity.

Ancient Greek moralists tried to define different kinds of love,purely in terms of the relative degree of selflessness, involved in the exercise of this noble virtue. The love which takes no thought of 'the self' but devotes itself utterly to the cause of others, reflects the noblest kind of love the human heart is capable of.

The wisdom writer presents in **Proverbs** the gradual unfolding of human personality, motivated and galvanized by the basic principle of love. Several virtues, which could contribute transformation of an ordinary man or woman, into a good husband, wife, father, mother, son, neighbour, host and above all, a good human being, are

dwelt on with profound insight by the author of **Proverbs**.

The ideal citizen depicted at the centre of the work, is not a dreamy or detached saint but a pragmatic householder, who is free from the vices of intemperance and immorality, utterly devoted to his wife, children and interests of the family. For, marriage is implicitly assumed as an unchallengeable norm for any human being:

> Among ancient people, marriage was considered a duty, and early marriage appears to have been the general custom (Prof. Toy 14).

Further, the sage of **Proverbs** is not antihedonistic in his attitude to life. He urges the young lover to be not merely loyal but ardent in his passionate devotion, "ravished always with her love" (P5:19). However, at the same time, the former is earnestly exhorted to value self-discipline:

> To drink waters out of thine own cistern
> and running waters out of thine own well.
> Let them be only thine own and not strangers' with thee (P5: 5,17).

According to Prof. Toy, the onus of providing satisfaction in marriage falls primarily on the woman. The imagery of 'water' here suggests that "his wife

should be a source of enjoyment as refreshing as water to a thirsty man" (115). However, for the continuity of enjoyment of harmonious, fulfilling conjugal relationship,both the endless capacity to satisfy on the part of the woman and the endless, almost insatiable, craving on the part of man, are necessary. That the man ought to take pleasure in his wife and treat her with tender affection, is further suggested through the images of "loving hind" and "pleasant roe" (P5: 19), which are associated with feminine beauty to be cherished with "gentleness and purity" (Bridges 65) as they guard him against the dangers of debauchery. T.Fritsch is of the opinion that the wisdom writer favours "a strongly monogamistic view of marriage" (IB 815), and a man's infidelity to his wife is punishable under law, as he violates the rights of another by taking a married woman as his accomplice: "Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?" (P6:27). The author of **Proverbs** advises the male partner to exercise a deeper, more patient discernment in his recognition of the value of the woman in marriage.

In the domestic sphere, conjugal love is suggested as the principal virtue among the earthly goods, and a man is directed to pursue it as "a broken marriage vow is a sin against an old comrade." (P2:19).

Like the Hebrew Book of wisdom **Tirukkural** accords a high priority for love and integrity in domestic life:

> If love and virtue in the household reign
> This is of life, the perfect grace and gain
> (T53).

Commenting on this **Kural**, Parimelazhagar says,

> When there is no love between a husband and wife, married life cannot find any fulfilment
> (T53).

Tiruvalluvar also idealizes conjugal love and dwells with relish, on the pleasures of the householder in marriage. A lover in **Tirukkural** makes the following comment on the quality of his affinity for his sweet heart:

> Between this maid and me, the friendship kind
> Is as the bonds that soul and body bind
> (T1122).

In another dramatic couplet, a young husband assures his newly married bride of his total devotion to her in the present birth, which moves the latter who breaks into instant passionate tears, as she grows suddenly apprehensive over the possibility of losing him in her future births:

While here I live, I leave you not
I said to calm her fears.
She cried, 'There, then I read your thought'
And straight dissolved in tears (T 1315).

Though Tiruvalluvar often visualizes conjugal love in idealistic terms as mentioned above, and defines his vision of man-woman relationship in almost a kind of spiritual terminology. Marital love, with him, no doubt has great pragmatic implications. R.Sethu Pillai points out how Tiruvalluvar's everyday implication of marital life is tinged with humanism:

> The fruits of affection are to conduct domestic affairs so as to produce pleasure and cause man to be benevolent to all living beings .... If love for wife does not exist, domestic affairs cannot be satisfactorily conducted (**Tirukkural-Ellis Commentary** 283).

Love that originates at home envisages monogamy as the sole guiding principle for a happy and harmonious married life. In a sense, Tiruvalluvar's pronouncements on marriage, reflect the ethos prevalent in the society at large during his age, and need not necessarily be viewed as the fruits of his own personal, analytic vision. Pointing this out, K.K.Pillai observes,

> In ancient Tamil Nadu, if a man and a woman live together in perfect union, they will get **moksha** (paradise) automatically. Hence Tiruvalluvar did not write of **moksha** (**Tamilaga Varalāru - Makkalum Paṇpādum**, 17).

That Tiruvalluvar endorses monogamy in the strongest terms possible, can be seen from the fact that he ignores with disdain, and a certain dignified coolness, any discussion related to prostitution.

Summarising Tiruvalluvar's vision of conjugal harmony, T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram lays emphasis on the spirit of selfless service which is the fruit and fulfilment of the devotion towards one's partner in marriage,which the Latin scholars envisioned as 'agape':

> Even at the very first step in real love which the married couple feel towards each other, love reflects this highest point .... The very body exists for the expression of love, which is the very basis of the glory achieved by the happy couple (63).

In addition to defining the role of woman in marriage, both the works dwell in detail on the role a woman ought to play in household affairs. Surprisingly enough, despite the primitiveness of the phase of human society during which these works were written, there had

been a considerable insight on the part of the authors in question, on the central function of the woman in a peaceful and prosperous household.

In **Proverbs** the woman is conspicuously assigned a pivotal role in ensuring the prosperity of the entire household:

> Every wise woman buildeth her house, but the foolish plucketh it down with her own hands (P14:1).

In the following verse, the woman's hands stand for her industry, dexterity and skill: "She seeks wool and flax and willingly works with her hands " (P31: 13).

Further, the Hebrew society assigned to the woman, a highly demanding daily routine. Her labour for the day, starts at dawn and stretches far into night:

> She also rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and a portion for her maid servants. Her lamp does not go out by night (P31:15).
> She stretches out her hands to the distaff
> And her hands hold the spindle (P31: 18).

Despite all the work she puts in, the woman is also expected to be considerably patient when it comes to a question of sharing the goods available:

> She watches over the ways of her house-hold;
> And does not eat the bread of idleness
> (P31:27).

In the ancient Hebrew society, the woman's primary concern was the affairs of the home, yet it is worth noting that the more enterprising woman among them, was also fully equipped to go well beyond the confines of her domestic bounds and was capable of organizing trade and commerce from distant shores:

> She is like the merchants' ship; she bringeth her food from afar (P31:14).

She is also a shrewd investor in agricultural property:

> She considereth a field and buyeth it. With the fruit of her hands, she planteth a vineyard (P31:6).

Because of her untiring industry, the members of her family are well-fed, finely-clad and comfortably lodged:

> All her household are clothed with scarlet
> (P31:2);
>
> .... and her clothing is silk and purple
> (P31: 22).

Thus, despite the fact that the woman's life is home- centred, she is not tethered merely to the confines of the household affairs. She plays an active role in public life and wields considerable-and, wholesome-influence in the society at large:

> She stretcheth out her hands to the poor, yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy (P31:20).
>
> She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness (P31:26).

Schloerb is of the view,

> Evidently much of the teaching activity in that time took place at home (IB 957).

In the eyes of some critics, such a definition of the social role of women is not laid down by any male chauvinistic individual or group of men, but by women alone:

> The high standard for womanhood, apparently drawn by one who was herself a virtuous woman, presents an inspiring goal. The cultural details of her specific tasks are different in our era but the principles are timeless (Sam Middlebrook 924).

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out here that there is no clinching evidence to prove that women were

their own law-makers in the ancient Hebrew society. The above view, hence, is not a totally dependable one.

Tirukkural portrays the woman's role as 'illāḷ' or efficient mistress of the household, who practises the domestic virtue of frugality and manages the finances of her husband with singular efficiency, being armed with the domestic virtues of thrift and industry. She is extolled because she spends carefully, well within the means of her husband:

> As doth the house beseem, she shows her wifely dignity,
> As doth her husband's wealth befit she spends (T 51).

She manages her household affairs by means of her skill in economy, as evidenced by her thrift and industry and her virtue of chastity, thereby preserving the unsullied fame and honour of the family:

> Who guards herself, for husband's comfort cares, her household's fame
> In perfect wise with sleepless soul preserves, gives her a woman's name (T 56).

Fidelity, prudence and chastity on the part of the wife, had a great bearing upon the happiness of the ancient Tamil household, irrespective of the man's character and activities. It is quite obvious that

Tiruvalluvar considers chastity as the prime virtue of a woman:

> If woman might of chastity retain
> What choicer treasure doth the world contain?
> (T 54).

That a woman who shows reverence to her husband is likely to win great excellence in the world of gods, thereby assuming herself certain attributes of divinity, is a view that is readily endorsed by Tiruvalluvar:

> If wife be wholly true to him who gained her as his bride,
> Great glory gains she in the world where gods in bliss abide (T 58).

The notion that a woman's redemption lies in the performance of her household duties, is deeply embedded in the cultural ethos of India as a whole. And whatever passed for mostly as wifely duties, implied in actuality, the dominance of men in their respective households.

In both the works, the virtuous woman is singled out as a source of tremendous power and value. **Proverbs** says,

> Who can find a virtuous woman, for her price is far above rubies? (P31:10).

Tiruvalluvar also echoes a similar view: "What is more excellent than a wife if she possesses the stability of chastity?" (T.54).

Such women are perennial sources of joy and glamour, and succeed not only in winning the confidence of their husbands and close relatives but also in ensuring the prosperity of their respective homes. It is interesting to note that both the works connect peace within the domestic bounds, with the woman's ideal of chastity playing a pivotal role. **Proverbs** says:

> The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil (P31:11).

To Tiruvalluvar,

> There is no lack within the house where wife.
> in worth excels,
> There is no luck within the house where wife
> dishonoured dwells (T 53).

The husband of a chaste woman enjoys peace, comfort and harmony at home and devotes himself utterly to public work. Both the works stress on the probability of ascendancy in the career of the husband in public life and prosperity, when his wife turns out to be loyal and virtuous.

Proverbs talks of such a fortunate man, in the following terms:

> Her husband is known in the gates,
> When he sits among the elders of the land
> (P31: 23).

Talking of the 'gates', Dake makes the following comment: "This was the centre of public life in the oriental city. Here the prophets prophesied (I **Kings** 22:10), legal transactions were made (**Ruth** 4:1), and the wise men proclaimed their teachings" (789).

In **Tirukkural** also, the wise women enable their husbands to bear themselves honourably with a lion-like gait, amidst their enemies. The dignity enjoyed by these men in the company of their foes is based on the former's consciousness of the integrity of their spouses at home:

> Who have not spouses that in virtue's praise delight
> They lion-like can never walk in scorner's sight (T59).

However, it should be pointed out here that though such an exemplary wife adept in both the kinds of work strives tirelessly for peace and prosperity of her home, and the well-being of her husband, she is not accorded complete

equality with her husband. While it is conceded that a woman's household drudgery, far from lowering her status, considerably enhances her own status in society, it should also be recognized that at the time of **Proverbs**, only under exceptional circumstances was the woman allowed to play any active role in public affairs, as can be seen from **Judges** Chapters 4 and 5 where Deborah is appointed a Judge in Israel, and is credited with qualities of leadership.

Unlike her western counterpart, the sphere of activity of women of the Orient is even more confined to the home, in accordance with the ancient Tamil cultural tradition. But the woman in **Proverbs** not only spends within her means but also enhances considerably her husband's income.

Further, the virtuous woman in **Proverbs** is described as being clothed with strength and honour (P31: 25), and depicted against the foil of an immoral woman who is ironically known by her attire:

> And behold, there met him a woman
> With the attire of a harlot and subtle of heart (P7: 10).

The Israelite sage explicitly urges the youth to avoid scrupulously the path of the prostitute:

Hearken unto me now therefore
O ye children and attend to the words of my mouth:
Let not thine heart decline to her ways,
go not astray in her paths (P7: 24,25).

It is also quite significant that in both the works in question, adultery is castigated as even more heinous a crime, than harlotry.

F.J.Dake, a well known commentator of **Proverbs** uses two words, **'Zur'** and **'năker'** to refer to an adulteress:

> 'Zur' is an apostate Israelite woman gone over to the idolatrous impurities of heathen religion, and 'năker' is a purely foreign woman of a similar character, who denotes one who is beyond the pale, both desperate and uninhibited; desperate, because she suffers ostracism and insecurity; and uninhibited because she defies religious and social sanctions and conventions, and is a law to herself (**Dake's Annotated Reference Bible**, 642).

An adulteress, on the other hand, is the wife of another man, referred to as 'a deep ditch'; 'a narrow

pit' (P23:27); 'a dangerous trap' and 'a deep and narrow grave'.

"For a whore is a deep ditch, and a strange woman is a narrow pit" (P23:27), who lures man with her charming flattery, oozing a seductive charm. "But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword" (P5:4).

As for the adulterer, "he spendeth his substance" (P29:3) and is awarded with "wound and dishonour" (P6: 33) and ends at length "destroying his own soul" (P6:32). The inevitable punishment the adulterer faces both in the face of law and the outraged husband of the adulteress, is suggested through rhetorical questions which are replete in rich metaphor:

> Can one take fire in his lap
> And his clothes not be burnt?
> Or can one walk on hot coals
> And his feet not be scorched? (P6: 27,28).

For in the days of **Proverbs**,

> if a man committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress will surely be put to death (**Leviticus** 20:10).

It should be pointed out in this context that **The Book of Leviticus** is the third Book ascribed to Moses, dated around 15th century B C , while **Proverbs** is dated 720 B.C.

And further, it is reasonable to assume that the Mosaic injunction spelt out in the pentateuch held absolute sway in the realm of Hebrew ethics till the reign of Solomon. Commenting on the draconian laws pertaining to adultery, Finnis Jenning Dake makes the following comment:

> Among the Romans, one caught in the act was delivered to the injured husband to be punished with infamy, disgrace and even death if he willed (**Dake's Annotated Reference Bible** 645).

Moreover, the house of the adulterous woman is referred to in **Proverbs** as "Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death." (P7:27).

Solomon offers several words of caution in respect of a youthful adulterer, assuming at times, the 'persona' of an uncompromising paternalistic father-figure:

> My son, keep thy father's commandment and forsake not the law of thy mother ... to keep thee from the evil woman. (P6:20).

He also uses gentle words of exhortation, highlighting the beneficial aspect of the moral code, laid down by the law of the Lord:

> The commandment is a lamp and the law is a light to keep thee from the evil woman and from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman (P6:23,24).

It is interesting to note here that the entire counsel given in **Proverbs** is addressed only to a male listener. Commenting on this C.H.Toy remarks,

> Women did not in ancient times form part of the audience addressed by men or of the public for which books were written (114).

Moreover, the depiction of the woman as an active seductress and man as the gullible victim is typical of ancient literature. As John J. Collins rightly points out,

> It reflects the male view point which is instinctively assumed in ancient literature (**Proverbs and Ecclesiastes** 218).

All the kings in Israel and Judah maintained large harems, (**Esther** 2: 3) and the harem of king Solomon has become proverbial:

> King Solomon loved many strange women together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the

> Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonites and Hittites. He had seven hundred wives, princesses and three hundred concubines. (I **Kings** 11: 1).

Yet, it is the very height of irony that the author of **Proverbs** does not venture to defend polygamy in any of his verses.

Tiruvalluvar singles out adultery and prostitution for caustic disapprobation in the chapters 'Non-coveting Another's Wife' and 'The Wanton Woman', in spite of the fact that the role played by prostitutes in society was regarded in the 'Sangam Age' of the Tamils, as an essentially cultural necessity and a way of life. The very allocation of more than one third of the **Aham** poems in the chapter on **Karpu** (Chastity) to prostitution, highlights the fact that in the 'Sangam Age', prostitution was accepted as a cultural necessity:

> Prostitution is the characteristic feature of **marutam** or the agricultural tract and the hero has extramarital relations (Dr. V.Sp.Manickam, 770).

Tiruvalluvar drives home the fact that contact with public women, paves way for not only material ruin, but also loss of the man's reputation and honour in

society. Referring to the evil perpetrated by greedy prostitutes, **Tirukkural** says:

> Those that choice armlets wear who seek not thee with love,
> But seek thy wealth, their pleasant words will ruin prove. (T 911).

Further, the false embrace of the harlot is likened in **Tirukkural** to "the embrace of a strange cadaver by hired men in a dark chamber". (T 913).

Tiruvalluvar advocates the cause of chastity in the most uncompromising manner possible and asserts that only the honour founded on goodness and universal love can save men from avaricious prostitutes:

> From contact with their worthless charms, whose charms to all are free,
> The men with sense of good and lofty wisdom blest will flee. (T 415).

It is interesting to note that Tiruvalluvar is not so harsh as the author of **Proverbs** towards the seekers of pleasure at the hands of prostitutes as he is towards the adulteresses. The man who covets another's wife is castigated as a despicable person who does not know 'the basic attributes of virtue' and 'the right to possession' (T 141):

They are numbered with the dead even while
they live-how otherwise
With wife of sure confiding friend who evil
things devise? (T 143).

To Tiruvalluvar, any one who lusts after another man's wife is no better than a dead man and 'hatred, sin, fear and foul disgrace will never desert him' (T 146).

The virtuous householder who "touches not her that is another's spouse shall obtain good in this world, surrounded by the huge terror-instilling sea". (T 146).

Thus, in a sense, Tiruvalluvar seems to emphasize the fact that the onus of maintaining one's own honour in society is very much on one's own head. The enumeration of the vice of harlotry along with drinking and gambling in **Tirukkural**, throws light also on the fact that indulgence in prostitution is considered nothing but an obnoxious habit leading to squandering of money, energy and reputation in society.

On the contrary, Tiruvalluvar strongly endorses the cause of monogamous marriage based on love which is nothing short of a veritable replica of divine love on earth. Moreover, allied to the significance of the family, is the attention paid to the education of

children. The love for one's wife is expected, in due course, to expand into an ever-widening circle to embrace one's love of one's own children and, subsequently, one's entire family and society in general.

Filial love is another important ethic stressed in **Proverbs**, for it ensures one's longevity. In **Proverbs** Solomon "exhorts, comforts and charges" (Bridges 10), himself being a self-conscious inheritor of a paternalistic tradition:

> I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also and said unto me: Let thine heart retain my words, keep my commandments and live (P4:3).

Roland E. Schloerb, a critic of **Proverbs**, describes the nurture that Solomon must have received from his parents in the Hebrew tradition, in the following manner:

> From his father and mother, a young man is to learn wisdom that will be as "an ornament and a guide for his life" (P4:9).

Commenting on the above verse, Charles T.Fritsch observes:

> The contents of the instruction are those laws and teachings which men in the preceding

> generations have found to be wise and true (IB 821).

Parents derive the greatest joy when they see their children grow and develop into persons of uprightness and integrity. Moreover, the fulfilment of parents is totally dependent on the attainment of their offsprings:

> A wise son maketh a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother (P10:1; 13:1; 15:20).

The wisdom of children brings joy and peace into the hearts of parents: "My son, if your heart is wise, thy heart will rejoice, mine too" (P23: 15).

It is important to remember that the Hebrew term for wise, 'hakkam', is used in the dual sense of possessing 'practical knowledge' as well as 'behaving well' (839):

> In contrast, with regard to foolishness, there are three types of fools mentioned here, the simple ones 'pathi' i.e., the inexperienced simpletons, the scoffer or scorner; 'tec' i.e., the contemptuous arrogant one who turns his back on the good and the fool 'kesil'

> i.e., the thick dull person who is insensible, ever averse to moral truth ... devoid of intellectual and religious insight (IB, 790).

Further, although wisdom is considered a gift from God "for the Lord giveth wisdom" (P2: 6), a receptive spirit is considered a vital prerequisite for wisdom in the Hebrew work of wisdom:

> My son, if you receive my words, making your ear attentive to wisdom, then you will understand (P2: 1-2.5).

Another equally important prerequisite for wisdom is an ardent quest for insight:

> Seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures. (P2:3-4).

Such a quest for insight, in turn, depends on the fear of God:
"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (P1:17). Here, "fear" is interpreted by Charles T.Fritsch as "reverence or awe as felt in the presence of the Deity" (IB, 785).

Moreover, the righteousness of the children can vindicate their fathers in the face of sociological challenges they may have to face in life:

> My son, be wise and make my heart rejoice that I may answer him who reproaches me (P27: 11).

In contrast, a foolish son is a continuous source of pain, vexation and embarrassment to his parents: "A foolish son is grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him". (P17: 25).

The values attached to familial relationship point to the importance assigned to the quality of life obtained at home, for "home is the first place from where wisdom is gleaned": "My son, attend unto my wisdom and bow thine ear to my understanding" (P5:1).

In their turn, parents receive explicit and strict instructions, with regard to the bringing up of their children. They are advised to resort to even punitive measures against erring children. Obedience on the part of the child, was elicited in the ancient Hebrew society, through instillation of a sense of fear:

> The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his father to shame (P29:5).,

and

> He that spareth his rod hateth his son (P13: 24).

Commenting on this aspect, Charles T.Fritsch makes a facile observation: "Corporal punishment was a

necessary part of the training of the Jewish child" (860), and the Wisdom writer is of the view that "Chastisement delivers his (a child's) soul from sheol". (P23:14).

Again, commenting on the advocacy of corporal punishment, George Lawson remarks:

> The rod joined with reproof is a means of giving wisdom and of making a child behave in such a manner that he may be a credit to his parents (**Proverbs** 5:23).

In the past, most people, in fact, thought of punishment only in terms of corporal punishment, inflicting a temporary pain by slapping or beating. This was regarded as the only effective way of preventing a child from misbehaviour. Such a belief is embodied in the popular old English saying, "Spare the rod and spoil the child."

However, several child-psychologists of today do not favour corporal punishment. For instance, Elizabeth B Hurlock, an eminent psychologist is of the view:

> Corporal punishment is .. the least satisfactory form of punishment, because children seldom associate the punishment with the act for which they are being punished. Since the anger of the adult is a more

> dominant factor in the situation than the punishable act itself, children tend to associate the disciplinarian with pain rather than the wrong deed (**Child Development**, 397).

On the other hand, George B. Thompson qualifies his endorsement of corporal punishment, saying that it should be used sparingly and that too, preferably not much after children are able to understand the reasons for rules:

> Punishment was found to be less effective than reward for changing the habitual way of behaving. (**Child Psychology**, 635).

The Hebrew sages place the onus of imparting moral training of the child, squarely on the shoulders of parents. Such a training must, of necessity, start sufficiently early when the mind of the child is most impressionable. Hence, parents are earnestly exhorted to catch the children when they are young, in order to ensure that they are conditioned to follow the path of righteous conduct: "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (P22:6).

According to Kenneth Boa, "'train up' here does not denote corporal punishment, but rather include three

ideas - dedication, instruction and motivation." (**The Open Bible**, 644).

> ... physical chastisement may at times be necessary and good but moral suasion is always better. (Graham Scroggie 3).

Nevertheless, it should be conceded here that there is considerable room for ambiguity in interpreting the above verse. It can be safely asserted in the light of the findings of modern child psychologists, that "the rod without affection is revolting tyranny." (Bridges 156).

Further, as Bridges rightly observes in this connection,

> Among the many modern theories of education how often is God's system overlooked .... The rod of discipline is its main character, not harsh severity but a wise, considerate, faithful exercise. (**Proverbs** 156).

The critic, Dennis Corrigan is noncommittal on this aspect of parents' nurture of children. He makes the following ambiguous statement:

> Perhaps Biblical wisdom most significantly challenges our modern philosophies and practices of child rearing. (**Bible for Spirit-Filled Living** 926).

As for the influence of home on the child, according to William Mckane,

> Home is the primary educational agency and it is there that the foundations of the civilized behaviour and general excellence are laid (**Proverbs** 268).

There is little doubt that in the patriarchal system which endorsed paternalistic values, the Hebrew parents demanded and extracted the strictest kind of obedience and the deepest reverence from their sons. Consequently, the wisdom writers classify and exalt filial obedience among the most important fruits of true wisdom:

> A wise son heareth his father's instruction;
> but a scorner heareth not rebuke (P13:1).

Solomon makes it abundantly clear that dishonouring parents is a heinous crime and an unnatural deed. The authority of parents is a discipline to which a child should submit himself without any second thought. Moreover, mocking, cursing, robbing and maltreating parents on the part of children, are included in the list of forbidden behaviour on the part of children in addition to disobedience:

> The eye that mocketh at his father and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and young eagles eat it (P30:17),
>
> Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness. (P20:20)

and

> He that wasteth his father and chaseth away his mother is a son that causeth shame, and bitter reproach. (P19:26).

It is interesting to note that the entire society was united in its explict condemnation of recalcitrant behaviour of children. William Mckane observes:

> The denial of burial is the ultimate disgrace and disaster. The bodies of such unnatural children will be exposed and the offending eye will be picked out and eaten away by the ravens. (657).

In **Proverbs** "consideration for parents is regarded as both a mark of wise living and motive for it" (IB 839).

Paying heed to parental instructions, honouring and obeying them were considered as the primary obligations of all Hebrew children. Sam Middlebrook, in his interpretation says, "Honour means to prize highly, show

respect, glorify and exalt" (**Bible for Spirit - Filled Living** 112). In the view of another critic, parental wisdom should be honoured and exalted as it is "a moral safeguard against a life of crime" and "productive of life, health and personal integrity". (Meril F.Unger, 292). It is the responsibility of the parents to inculcate not only virtues but also good habits in their children.

Tiruvalluvar also recognizes the lasting value of wise and learned children. A wise son is not merely desirable, as the means of continuing the name of the family, but remains a primary source of happiness for his parents in this world and the next:

> Of all that men acquire, we know not any greater gain
> Than that which by the birth of the learned children men obtain (T 61).

As Ellis puts it,

> The providing for the permanence of his race ... the maintenance of his domestic fires and perpetuation of the sacred rights and honours rendered to his ancestors in the periodical solemnities are duties incumbent above all others on him (**Tirukkural-Ellis Commentary** 292).

A wise son is capable of performing the duties expected of him and so, the son is to be properly nurtured and trained to shoulder responsibility in future. When children are wise, they prove to be a source of immense and perennial joy to their parents and society:

> The children's wisdom greater than their own confessed
> Through the wide world is sweet to every human breast (T 68).

In sharp contrast, a foolish son who takes to bad habits in his formative years, brings sorrow upon his mother:

> The drunkard's joy is sorrow to his mother's eyes (T 423).

Hence, Tiruvalluvar insists on parental responsibility "to mould a good disposition free from vice" (T 62) in children. Though he does not dwell elaborately on the manner of nurture of good children, he highlights the imperative need of bringing up good children.

Further, Tiruvalluvar lays a great stress on parental responsibility to provide a sound education to children. Significantly enough, the emphasis on education in Tiruvalluvar, envisages a kind of academic

pursuit which will eventually be approved by the wise in society. Hence, in a way, the advocacy of the cause of education in this context, becomes almost tantamount to exhortation for acquiring wisdom among the Hebrews. That the Tamil sage pleads for the advancement of education in the sense of promotion of wisdom, a more exalted, profound and comprehensive accomplishment, can be seen clearly from the following verse:

> Sire greatest boon on son confers who makes him meet
> In councils of the wise to fill the highest seat (T 66).

Commenting on the above couplet, Samy Chidambaram rightly chooses to give an elaborate account of the plight of the seekers of knowledge in the days of Tiruvalluvar:

> There were no good educational institutions then. The people were at the mercy of their learned teachers. A father should send his son to the residence of the learned teacher even when it happened to be far away (**Valluvar Valntha Tamilagam** 80).

Thus, in the ancient Tamil society, making the son learned and well-equipped for the progress of the society, was considered to be the prime duty of a

father. It is significant that there are not many references to the chastising or disciplining activity carried out by the parent in **Tirukkural**.

Tiruvalluvar minces no words in asserting that children are the rewards of a person's deeds in former births. Hence, wise children are not only the heralds of great fortune, but are veritable agents to protect their parents from "Seven-fold maze of birth" (T 62).

Thus, in both the cultures in question, children were regarded as the wealth of parents. In **The Bible**, they were regarded as the gifts of God. For example, in **Genesis** Chapter 33, when Jacob came with his wives and children to meet his elder brother, after several years of sojourn in the country of his father-in-law, he told his brother that "they were his children which God hath graciously granted thy servant" (**Genesis** 33:5). Children were also considered as precious as "the crown of old men" (P17:6).

But in **Tirukkural**, children are regarded as the rewards for the parents' deeds, which are in accordance with the popular belief of the people, that the birth of good sons proceeds from the good deeds and of bad sons from the evil deeds of their parents, in accordance with the Hindu theory of **karmā**:

'Man's children are his fortune', say the wise;
From each one's deeds his varied fortunes rise. (T 63).

Thus, in the Tamil culture a mysterious, inevitable ontological link is established between parents and children.

Further, in **Proverbs** a good man transmits material benefits which accrue from his goodness to his posterity. He not only "leaveth an inheritance to his children's children" (P13:22), but all his descendants are blessed through him.

George Lawson interprets the above blessing from a more pragmatic, sociological perspective:

> He leaves to them the good will of men, and many precious promises, the influence of his example and instruction descend to his posterity and they are enriched with substance for his sake. (180).

Tirukkural also affirms that a good man successfully transmits to his posterity all the material benefits, which are never destroyed:

The just man's wealth, unwanting shall endure,
And to his race, a lasting joy ensure. (T 112).

This may be interpreted as the good man's earthly benefits getting transferred to his children without any loss, because his children have been already nurtured in good ways and hence, do not squander their inheritance. Further, in their turn, they too make every effort to bring up good children. Such inheritances will continue to make them prosper, generation after generation. Both the writers insist on children bringing honour to parents and making them happy by their wise way of living:

> The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice,
> And he who gets a wise child will delight in him (P23: 24).

Tirukkural holds a very similar view:

> To sire, what best requital can by grateful child be done?
> To make men say, "What merit gained the father such a son?" (T 70).

But **Tirukkural** does not say anything explicit either on the mode of disciplining children, or the punishment to be accorded to them, in case of any lapse on the part of the children.

Both the works are of the view that parents are responsible for their children's education and nurture and in turn, a wise mode of conduct on the part of

children, speaks eloquently of the parents' virtues. A parent may be taken to task for the criminal actions of his son, and, in such a case, a son's lapse becomes, in a sense, the parent's own failure. So the parent expects his son to act in ways that bring honour to the family's name. Schloerb remarks:

> The parent-child relationship is a two-way traffic. Each affects the other. When parents are wise in their living, children are made glad. When children are wise in their chores, a parent's heart is made glad (839).

Unlike in the Hebrew tradition, Tamil cultural tradition exalts the stature of parents to the level of the divine.

Thiru V.Kalyana Sundaram says:

> Some worship God in the form of father.
> Many others regard Him as mother.
> But none can deny the motherly nature in God
> (**Peṇṇin Perumai**, 4).

Tiruvalluvar makes it also clear that the parent's love for children expresses itself in the innocent pleasures of bodily contact:

> The food on the platter that gets smashed and squeezed by the ever-playful, tender fingers of children turn in an instant to sweet ambrosia (T 64).

In another verse, Tiruvalluvar remarks:

> Only those whose ears have not been tuned to relish the sweet notes in the melodious lisp of babies, may opt for the quality of music emanating from lutes and flutes (T.65).

In this context, it is pertinent to recall Prof. T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram's comments on the unselfish nature of the bliss involving both parents and children:

> There is no selfishness - at least conscious selfishness - in this bliss on either side. This experience should become universal. In the absence of family, they succumb themselves to wasting disease and become selfish pleasure-seekers
>
> (**Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar**, 64).

Thus, we find that both the literary works compared, have an explicit deontological purpose in view, though the manner in which they work out their respective 'ethos' is very much leavened by the cultural *milieu* to which they belong. **Proverbs** seems to represent the composite culture of the collective wisdom of the entire Middle East, including that of Egypt, Israel's arch political rival of the time. **Tirukkural** too may be said to represent the collective wisdom of the ages, though it eminently upholds the basic tenets

of the Tamil tradition, despite its transcendent vision. Both the works aim at promoting a highly pragmatic, materialistic scale of values with an ultimate teleological end.

Nevertheless, there is a distinct prescriptive tone about **Proverbs**, bordering on the dictatorial, coming as it does from a courtly origin that could presume upon the divine right of kings. **Tirukkural**, on the other hand, relies on the strength of its earthly logic and pragmatic insights into human psychology and is executed in an incisive idiom.

The tone in which injunctions are formulated in **Proverbs** smacks of an imposing - almost royal - origin, though they all pertain to the morality and behaviour of the common man. When the Tamils of the Saṅgam Age were challenged by the fast-spreading religious insights of Buddhism and Jainism, Tiruvalluvar was, in a way, compelled to take an extremely tolerant and rational profile, while addressing himself to moral issues. His tone was necessarily bound to be more cautious, conciliatory and sophisticated, so that none would take offence and everyone was challenged with issues founded on authentic truth.

Both **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** treat the life of the householder as normative, thereby subscribing to the

relevance and merit of the family, constituting the bedrock of stability in society. Both advocate the virtue of monogamy in the strongest terms possible and implicitly endorse 'agape' in all sound relationships. The pivotal role played by the woman in every household goes unchallenged in both the works under discussion, though **Proverbs** assigns extended roles to certain exceptional wise women who go on to win laurels in the public avenues of life such as commerce, industry, and trade which are normally dominated by men. On the other hand, in the world of **Tirukkural** andro-centrism is so complete that a public role for any woman is not even contemplated, and the woman is supposed to find fulfilment in her domestic virtues of thrift and industry. Chastity for women, extolled in both the works is inextricably linked with domestic harmony and bliss, and is viewed as instrumental in the promotion of the interests or status of their husbands. Both **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** reserve a special dose of invective for the adulteress vis-à-vis a professional whore, who is likely to reck the harmony in many a household.

Both the works suggest how, in an andro-centric society, the love of the wife ultimately leads the man to the love of children. While discussing parent-child relationship, **Proverbs** tends to emphasize the need for

right nurture, through a strict upbringing which allows room, at times, for capital punishment too. **Tirukkural**, on the other hand, while appreciating the son's duty towards his parents, exhorts the parents to impart wisdom and academic training to the children, which, in the long run, will enable them to realize the value of their relationship with their parents.

Most of the words addressed to the son in **Proverbs** employ stern do's and don'ts, with a fair amount of admonition, while those meant for children in **Tirukkural** are positive suggestions, and psychological incentives like rewards of education, goodwill and devotion to parents, honour in the society and the like. A comparatively larger space is allowed in **Tirukkural** for children to develop spontaneously along the right lines. Both the works stress the value of a good home in the nurture of the children, and both highlight the right kind of legacy the parents should leave behind for their children, namely, a righteous code of conduct which, while constituting a precious reward in itself, is equally pleasing in the sight of heaven. However, as definition of the '**moksha**' or heaven can be called only as either implicit or vague in **Tirukkural**, the value of good children is highlighted in pronounced humanistic or existential terms.

CHAPTER FOUR

ETHICS FOR SOCIAL HARMONY

A work often proves to be the product of the Age in which it is conceived and reflects the ethos and values of the society in which the creator lives. As Wilbur Scott rightly observes,

> Art is not created in a vacuum; it is the work not simply of a person, but of an author fixed in time and space answering to a community of which he is an important articulate part.
>
> (**Five Approaches**, 123).

Hence, in a sense, any literary work can be regarded both as a social document and a monument of a particular Age. This chapter brings into limelight, the preoccupation common to both Solomon and Tiruvalluvar, with regard to the factors contributing to peace, happiness and harmony in the respective social *milieux* of the two ancient societies compared, which gave birth to these great literary works, **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural**.

Further, a writer's own personal ideology is also likely to affect certain aspects of his art, which to a certain extent, may be viewed as an evidence of the fact that art is, after all, a social document of its time.

It either interrogates the state of affairs in which it is conceived and executed, or inherits certain distinct marks of influence of the contemporary society.

This chapter deals mainly with a number of motifs associated with the theme of social order and harmony in **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural**. According to Weisstein, " 'motif' designates a thematic unit, (*Stofflich*) which does not yet encompass an entire plot" (139). And, situations like motifs can be reshuffled in numerous ways to form myriads of constellations of genuine motifs, which Weisstein personally prefers to refer to, as "the impersonal situations" (139). Further, the literary motif is conducive to action only to the extent that it contains a situational element. From a literary view point, situation denotes divergent feelings or thoughts reflected in giving rise to an action or conflict. But "an action suggests physical activity whereas the motif is abstracted from concrete reality" (147). All the motifs included in this chapter, pertain to nuances relating to one's own relationship with one's neighbours, such as kindness and empathy expressed through gestures of generosity, compassion, charity, benevolence, honesty, equity, probity and avoidance of negative passions like anger, envy, covetousness, pride, indolence, intemperate language and indulgence in any kind of addiction to liquor and the vice of gambling.

The concept of social norms constitute the very foundation of social structure, as no social group can exist without certain standards or common ideas governing the conduct of individual members. In the words of a social critic, Sankar Rao,

> Norms refer to the rules that guide behaviour in everyday situations and are derived from values (**Sociology**, 508).

As for the norms with regard to one's 'neighbour', Prof. Toy sees the neighbour as

> one who stands in close social relations from whom therefore sympathy may be expected or to whom sympathy is due (**ICC on Proverbs**, 293).

Now, one of the common motifs with regard to norms stressed both in **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural**, in respect of one's neighbour, is that of practising kindness:

> Kindness is a matter not of option but of obligation; an act of justice no less than of mercy. Not indeed that it may be demanded by our fellowmen. But the obligation lies upon conscience, and to withhold the due will be our eternal damnation (C. Bridges 48).

The way to express kindness is to help the fellowmen in times of need and allow them to live peacefully. **Proverbs** explicitly instructs the

individual "not to withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in the power of your hand to do it". (P3:27).

Such kindness, as a corollary, anticipates the virtue of generosity in its turn: "This bountifulness is a privilege and many a rich blessing is sealed to it" (Brown, 253).

Another quality stressed in **Proverbs** in respect of every member of the society is 'compassion', which implies a capacity to feel with others and to suffer with them, if necessary. However, in a materialistic context, the virtue of generosity blends with the quality of compassion, resulting in an over-all considerate attitude towards the poor and the oppressed: "He that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he". (P14: 21).

George Lawson rightly interprets the import of **Proverbs** when he says:

> The greatest insurer on earth cannot make so much of his money as the man who gives to the poor (**Proverbs** 307),

because it is God's ordinance that

> The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself (P11:25).

Tiruvalluvar also emphasizes love for one's neighbour on the part of any individual, the lack of which reduces him to a "bony framework clad with skin" (T 80).

In the light of the above **kural**, Rev. Ellis comments:

> Love is the real sign of life; when that existeth not,
> This body like a corpse, is merely skin and bone. (**Tirukkural - Ellis Commentary** 292).

Tiruvalluvar sees charity as "giving to the destitute" (T 221). He lays stress on the three stages of sacrifice, by comparing the wealthy to the water reservoir in the village, the fruit-bearing tree and the medicinal tree living in the heart of the village.

The water reservoir is useful when used; if not, it evaporates or stagnates and putrefies, but the prospective beneficiary has to reach out to the reservoir. In the second case, wealth is "like a tree that bears fruits in the village central mart" (T 216), suggestive of its ready availability without eliciting any kind of prerequisite behaviour on the part of the needy. In the third case, wealth functions much as a 'medicinal tree', in the sense, it is useful at the most opportune moment to those who require it, symbolizing

someone endowed with a spirit of 'agape', as T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram comments,

> it is an embodiment of absolute self-sacrifice, a complete self-effacement in the cause of love and society. (**Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar** 81).

> Unfailing tree that healing balm distils from every part
> Is ample wealth that falls to him of large and noble heart. (T 217).

The above **kural** recalls Portia's words in **The Merchant of Venice**:

> The quality of mercy is not strained
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven.
> (Act IV Scene I,ll 177-178).

Benevolence is another salient social virtue, stressed in **Tirukkural**, again and again:

> Though sharp their wit as file, as blocks they must remain
> Whose souls are void of 'courtesy humane.' (T 997).

and "All wealth acquired with perseverance by the worthy is for the exercise of benevolence" (T 212). A genuinely generous act seeks nothing in return. The

rain-bearing clouds attain relief only when they exhaust themselves in a downpour. Similarly, the benevolent feel contented only in helping others by emptying themselves to their heart's content. In contrast, "the futility of the miser is compared to a fair spinster who grows aged in loneliness" (T.1007). Commenting on the virtue of generosity, T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram observes, "Charity to the needy brings its immediate joy and bliss of giving" (85). According to Tiruvalluvar,

> Whose soul delights with hungry men to share his meat;
> The hand of hunger's sickness sore shall never feel (T.227).

Such a man of charitable disposition shall never be touched by the fiery disease of hunger or want.

T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram recounts Tiruvalluvar's view on a charitable disposition in the following manner:

> It is indeed more miserable than beggary to enjoy all alone the accumulated goods. There is greater pleasure in giving before the other expresses his need. As soon as his needs are satisfied, there is the divine bliss inspired by the happy and contented face of the human soul (**Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar** 86).

Both the works of wisdom emphasize the need for showing charity to those in need. Solomon asserts that "He who gives to the poor will not lack" (P28: 27). Tiruvalluvar affirms:

> Call that a gift to needy men thou dost dispense;
> All else is void of good, seeking for recompense (T 221).

Tiruvalluvar is of the view that "to give is the characteristic of the man of noble birth" (T 221). Thus both the works promise generous rewards to those who are charitable to their fellowmen.

Moreover, the Wisdom writer is very much opposed to any act of oppression directed against the poor and the helpless in society and comments that any deed of oppression is tantamount to "reproaching the Maker" (P14:31), and "the Lord will plead their cause and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them" (P22:22-23). In the words of Rolland W.Schloerb,

> God helps those who cannot help themselves ... since He has made them as ends, and not as objects to be used (IB 909).

The Wisdom writer exhorts the youth further, not "to devise evil against the neighbour" (P3: 29), which is "an indication of a heart, base and depraved, beyond

the common pitch of human wickedness" (George Lawson 51) "He who despises his neighbour, sins" (P14: 21) and "will start strife or spread it" (P25: 8).

Tiruvalluvar is also of the view that the riches acquired through evil means will bring about only evil:

> Though ill to neighbour wrought should glorious pride of wealth secure
> No ill to do is fixed decree of men in spirit pure. (T 311)
>
> Over every evil doer evil broodeth still (T 320).

Hence, those who desire to be free from sorrow should cause no pain to others.

Tiruvalluvar advises his readers in unequivocal terms, not to devise one's neighbour's fall: "Plot not thy neighbour's fall" (T 204). Hence,

> To work no wilful woe, in anywise through all the days
> To any living soul is virtue's highest praise. (T 317),

because evil visits the very person who devises evil against the neighbour:

> If, ere the noontide, you to others evil do,
> Before the eventide will evil visit you. (T 319)

According to the Israelite sage, an evil devised against a neighbour is a curse spoken against God, while to Tiruvalluvar, it brings about evil upon oneself. It is not surprising that both the works of wisdom reiterate the need to avoid devising or harbouring evil of any kind to one's neighbour. For, only when a person is well-disposed to his neighbour, can he expect any good turn from the latter's hands in times of his own need. Further, enjoying the goodwill of one's immediate neighbour ensures one's complete security and well-being during a time of crisis. In fact, as John Garlock puts it, "Neighbourly honesty is a practical application of wisdom" (**BSFL** 889).

Further **Proverbs** highlights the need for justice repeatedly: "A false balance is an abomination to the Lord; but a just weight is His delight" (P11:1).

> He that justifieth the wicked and he that condemneth the just, even they both are an abomination to the Lord (P17: 15).

"A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, a sword and sharp arrow" (P25: 18) which are all symbols of deadly destruction. As George Lawson comments:

> It is like indulging oneself in a piece of barbarity, destroying the reputation, mangling their character" 448).

In **Proverbs**, justice is assigned an exalted place of honour as an essential virtue of wise living: "To do justice and judgement is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (P21:3).

Tiruvalluvar too accords a high priority to justice while making his pronouncements on neighbourly relations. Shunmuga Subramaniam observes,

> Justice, in its purely ethical aspect is justness, a moral quality residing in a disposition of character. The purpose of justice as a social virtue is to maintain or to restore an equilibrium in human affairs (**Lectures in Concepts of Law in Tirukkural on TSEL** 490).

Justice implies an unbiased condition of mind:

> In Greek, justice signifies equal distribution and it signifies maintenance of a middle station or state of equality with regard to all others, not moving to either side or being biased (**Tirukkural, Ellis Commentary** 367).

Equity enables a man to render justice irrespective of whether a person is a fraud or an enemy, or of neutral standing: "Giving to each his due, - 'tis man's one highest gain" (T.111). Tiruvalluvar goes even further:

> To stand like balance-rod that level hangs and rightly weighs
> With calm unbiased equity of soul, is sages' praise (T 118).

In the words of Ellis:

> The balance is an emblem of Justice in India as well as in Europe. We have received the idea from the ancient figure of Justice personified with a pair of scales in her hand but in India, it was actually connected with the administration of law (**Ellis - Tirukkural Commentary** 368).

The man who departs from equity, brings upon himself destruction. Tiruvalluvar advocates his concern for others, with a sense of justice: "As thriving trader is the trader known, who guards another's interests as his own" (T 120); and "If a man departs from equity he will discern signs of impending ruin" (T 116).

The Wisdom writer suggests further that "sharing food" (P22:9); "lending money" (P28:8) and "defending rights" (P31: 9) are some of the vital means by which one can show kindness in a pragmatic way. Such a person honours God and will lack nothing. In **kurals** like these it must be borne in mind that though blessings are

promised in the name of God, the ultimate stress is on Man's welfare and well-being.

Further, **Proverbs** condemns malice and slander of any kind, for slandering and the use of harsh language oppress others:

> He that hideth hatred with lying lips and he that uttereth a slander is a fool (P10:18).

C.H.Toy paraphrases this verse as follows:

> The suggestion is that concealed hatred expresses itself in slander, the two are related as cause and effect which is itself an underhand procedure (216).

Further, the Wisdom writer wants to stress the evils of tale-bearing:

> The words of the tale-bearer are as wounds and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly (P26:22), though they are "greedily picked up by the hearers like the dainty morsels and stowed away with gleeful maliciousness" (ICC. 886).

"A tale bearer revealeth secrets" (P11:13). While referring to this verse, C.Bridges observes, "The breath of this cruel trifler ... for as readily as he reveals our neighbours' secrets to us, will he reveal ours to

him. All the bonds of confidence and friendship are broken in pieces" (113).

For, "A whisperer separateth chief friends" (P16:28); "Where there is no wood, the fire goes out and when there is no tale-bearer, strife will cease" (P26:20). It is better to discuss a disputed matter in private and settle it at a personal level, than bringing it to court: "Debate thy cause with the neighbour himself and discover not a secret to another " (P25:9).

A babbler is universally disliked and despised; the neighbours' matters should not publicly be discussed: "Words are dynamites; they can destroy people. They should be carefully weighed before they are spoken". (**Family Devotional Study Bible**, 553).

The mouth of the righteous is also compared to "a well of life" (P10:11) and "choice silver" (P10:20). Similarly, Tiruvalluvar condemns the slanderer who "cuts the very root of friendship which binds society together by sowing discard (**Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar** 74). The following **kurals** underscore this view:

> With friendly art who know not pleasant words to say,
> Speak words that sever hearts, and drive choice friends away (T 187);

The slanderous meanness that an absent friend defames,
This man in words own virtue, not in heart, proclaims. (T 185).

Thus, both the works highlight the evil perpetrated in society by slanderers, condemning such depraved souls in one voice. While **Proverbs** considers the slanderer a fool, **Tirukkural** regards him, a wearisome weight to the earth.

In Hebrew, "The common word for friend is 'rea' which means 'neighbours' ... at its nearest; it stands for a person with whom one has close fellowship" (Derek Kidner 44). According to **Proverbs**, one's neighbour, who is near at hand with readiness to assist, is better than a brother who is far off: "Better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off" (P27:10).

Proverbs also outlines the three-fold kinds of service rendered by friends, namely rescuing a person out of the wrong path with words of candour, leading him in the right path by offering counsel and being tactful, so as to show respect for his feelings and share his misfortunes. It goes on to assert: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful " (P27: 6). C. Bridges attaches a great value

to the stern words of counsel uttered by a sincere friend:

> The genuineness of friendship without open rebuke is more than doubtful; its usefulness is utterly paralysed (432).

Proverbs instructs the youth: "withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee and so hate thee " (P25:17). That tactfulness in not being hearty at the wrong time when it is unwelcome, is stressed here:

> He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him. (P27:14).

Proverbs suggests circumspection in all intimate relationships:

> As a man who casteth firebrands, arrows and death,
> so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour,
> and saith Am not I in sport? (P26: 18,19).

C.Bridges expatiates on the meaning of the above verse as follows:

> He that purposely deceives his neighbour, under colour of a jest, is no less prejudicial to him than a lunatic, that doth wrong out of frenzy and distemper (424).

Thus, the thoughtless jester's foolish habit of deceiving for the sake of mere amusement, is soundly condemned by the Jewish law-giver, as he does not know when his joke has gone too far.

The Israelite is, nevertheless, extremely sensitive to the cheering effect of a good fellowship: "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so doth the sweetness of man's friend by hearty counsel" (P27:9). Thus, sympathy is rightly acclaimed as the balm of friendship by the author of **Proverbs**. In the words of C.Bridges:

> The heartiness of a friend's counsel constitutes its excellence. It is not official or merely intelligent. It is the counsel of his soul (430).

When the countenance is overcast with melancholy, the choice words of a friend infuse gladness into the heart of a person and cheers him up. In the words of Solomon, "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (P27: 17). Charles Fritsch highlights the truth of the the above verse:

> This verse states one of the most important aspects of educational process. His intention is not to harm another but to remove all blocks that prevent him from being his best self (IB, 882).

Further, constancy is considered as the basis of friendship in **Proverbs**. Fair-weather friends who cling to the rich, profess a kind of love which lasts only so long as their prosperity does. This is implied in the following verse: "The poor is hated even by his own neighbours but the rich hath many friends" (P14: 20). Bacon is of the view,

> The personal fruition in any man cannot reach to feel great riches; there is a custody of them; or a power of dole and donative of them; or a fame of them; but no solid use to the owner (Selby ed. 91).

Human nature defers to the rich for the sake of favours only, while "a true friend loveth at all times" (P17: 17) and "in times of adversity, he is more than a brother in his attachment and devotion " (P18: 24).

In the view of C. Bridges,

> A true friend is no common acquisition ... to throw him away by neglect, caprice, unreasonable disgust or needless offence is to show himself utterly unworthy of the blessings (265).

Also, the Wisdom writer warns the young man from a moral and prudential perspective, not to join a band of violent men to throw himself into any kind of ruthless

shared enterprise, as "their feet run to evil and make haste to shed blood" (P1: 10). The law of the Israelites at the time was very strict in this regard for,

> wrong doing will be punished in this life and criminals cannot in the long run escape the vigilance of law (C.H.Toy 18).

Solomon earnestly instructs the youth to be vigilant enough to keep good company:

> Enter not into the path of the wicked ... for they sleep not except when they have done mischief (P4:14).

as "mischief is their meat and drink" (Job 15: 16). They will face a sorrowful end as "the wicked shall be cut off from the earth " (P2:22).

Tiruvalluvar devotes 50 couplets in all to study the question of friendship. He too stresses the three-fold services rendered by good friends, namely,

> To take his fellow-being off the wrong path thereby saving him from ruin, to keep him in the way of virtue and in troublesome time weep with him who weeps (T1 787).

Further, he has the duty to rebuke the friend at the time of deviation from the right path. Hence,

Tiruvalluvar exhorts the youth to exercise extreme care over the choice of friends:

> Make them your chosen friend whose words repentance move,
> With power prescription's path to show, while evil they reprove (T 795).

Keeping in mind that friendship is not for laughter only but "for strokes of sharp reproving, when from right you stray " (T 784).

He also instructs the youth to avoid fair-weather friends as

> the very thought of the friendship of those who have deserted one at the approach of adversity will burn one's mind at the time of death (T1 799);

> Where is friendship's royal state? In stable mind,
> Where friend in every time of need support may find (T 789).

Tiruvalluvar is also of the view that it is futile to cultivate the friendship of those who love when there is gain, and leave when there is loss. But he is quick to add:

> In anywise maintain not intercourse with those
> Who in the house are friends, in hall are slandering foes (T 820).

For such dissemblers can show only outward friendship but they nourish a deep-seated hatred in their hearts. What is required in true friendship is an identity of feelings: " 'Tis the unison of feeling friends unites kindred mind " (T 785).

Even as the wisdom writer, Tiruvalluvar stresses the value of "old and faithful-friends who never forsake, the world commends" (T 809), he compares money-minded friends to prostitutes and thieves who "accept whatever you give" (T 813). He is as much concerned with shunning evil companions, as he is about winning the love of sincere friends:

> Cling to the friendship of the spotless one's; whatever you pay,
> Renounce alliance with the men of evil way.
> (T 800).

The honey-tongued dissemblers who hide the evil in their hearts lose their integrity as their words do not get translated into action.

Tiruvalluvar also has a worldlywise piece of advice, to deal with hypocrites who pretend to be friends:

Friendship of those who seem our kin but are not really kind,
Will change from hour to hour like woman's mind (T. 822).

'Tis just when men make much of you and then despise
To make them smile, and slap in friendship's guise (T 829).

When one's foes begin to affect friendship, one should love them with one's looks and cherishing no love in the heart, give up even the former (T1.830).

Tiruvalluvar is pragmatic enough to suggest here that

It is better to dread the friendship of foes who seem like kinsmen than foes who appear with drawn swords (T1 882).

Tiruvalluvar cautions that we should be careful about the choice of our friends, as the character of the man resembles that of his associates:

The waters' virtues change with soil through which they flow;
As man's companionship, so will his wisdom show (T. 452).

Shakespeare also holds a similar view:

> Friendship thou hast and their adoption tried
> Grapple them to thy soul with hoop of steel.
> (**Hamlet** I Act III Scene lines 63-64).

As regards good neighbourly relations, truthfulness and love are the two most important virtues, which pave the way for any such fruitful relationship. As regards the value of truthfulness or probity in a relationship, C.H.Toy observes:

> The most desirable thing in life is the insight which enables one to order one's life by the standard of truth (164).

The Jewish Wisdom writer earnestly exhorts the youth "to buy truth" (P23:23) and "let not mercy and truth forsake thee" (P3:3) for

> mercy and truth are complimentary to each other and may be said to form a perfect moral character. (58)

Dwelling on the manifestations of truth, C.Bridges finds a close affinity between truthfulness and depth in any relationship:

> The faithful man makes no loud profession. He is true to his word. He fulfils his engagements .... He will prefer his conscience to his interest (467).

C.H.Toy also connects truth with integrity and loyalty:

> Faithfulness is steadfastness, fidelity to one's word and to the obligations which spring from one's relations with men (58).

Truth is also the fire of holiness in which every kind of "iniquity is purged" (P3:3). George Lawson stresses the imperative need of truth in any kind of personal bond, for

> wisdom and understanding which is not grounded in truth is but craftiness and splendid ignorance and that instruction which is not according to truth is poison to the soul (410).

Further, a pair of lying lips is an abomination in the sight of the Lord: "Those who deal truthfully are His delight" (P12:22). "He that speaketh lies shall not escape" (P19:5) and "The lies will be refuted and the liar punished" (**The NIV Study Bible**, 962). According to the Wisdom writer,

> Truthful lips endure for ever;
> But a lying tongue lasts only a moment (P12:19).

Tiruvalluvar also exalts the value of truthfulness in respect of one's utterance. He approves only of "a speech from every taint of evil free" (T.291), as Truth

is nothing less than "a lamp of pure radiance bright" (T 299), and to "this every virtue yields spontaneously" (T 296).

Like the Jewish sage, Tiruvalluvar also believes that "inner purity will flow from truth alone" (T 298), and

> External cleanliness can be procured by a wash with water,
> But internal cleanliness can be secured by truth-speaking (T 298).

When "a man knowingly tells a lie ... his mind will burn him with the memory of his guilt" (T 293), and, in consequence, ruin his integrity and peace of mind:

> If a man lives true to his inmost soul, he lives enshrined in the souls of all mankind (T1 294).

for a man of integrity is superior to "those who make gifts and practise austerities" (T.295). Tiruvalluvar exhorts everyone to practise truth:

> In all your life, utter truth, the truth alone,
> 'Tis well, though other virtuous acts be undone (T 297).

Also, Tiruvalluvar warns of the possibility of falsehood being mistaken for Truth at times, purely depending on the outcome of a particular effort. "Falsehood may take the place of truthful word; If blessing, free from fault, it can afford" (T 292). As Dr. V.A.Devasenapathi has observed, to the Tamil sage, "Truth is not a mere academic matter but a practical issue" (**Tmt. Sornammal Endowment Lectures** 352).

Dr. Aram makes an attempt to justify Tiruvalluvar's concept of truth by saying that a mere inconsiderate utterance of truth blurted out at a wrong moment may do more harm than help:

> Suppose the law were to allow every person to speak the truth without caring for the consequences, life in society would be intolerable .... Every man's good name will be in constant jeopardy of being sullied by unpleasant truths that do not benefit the society in any way but make the lives of the individual miserable (TSEL 471).

It is interesting also to note that in **Tirukkural**, absolute truth is different from 'Vāimai' or truthfulness in speech. Dr.S.Muthusamy remarks,

> The categorical interpretation of Parimelazhagar that speaking harmful truth is

> prohibited has attracted the attention of legal expert Thiru M.Shanmuga Sundaram who has established that the above couplets as interpreted by Parimelazhagar are surprisingly in tune with the most modern legal concepts of our time (**Tamil Culture as revealed in Tirukkural** 138).

Obviously, the basic cause for adaptation of such a compliant attitude towards utterance of relative truth in Tiruvalluvar, is simply to establish or preserve social harmony.

Tiruvalluvar decries anger as a passion. For instance, George Lawson rightly points out how anger in a person is destructive:

> A passionate disposition makes a man the firebrand of society; but meekness makes him a blessing to his neighbour (219).

Anger is a reprehensible passion, symptomatic of weakness in human nature, as it is the cause and effect of emotional imbalance. Charles T.Fritsch is of the opinion that it is the wise who manage to maintain a high degree of self-possession at all times:

> Only a fool allows himself a big explosion of feeling whenever he is irritated but the wise

> man can direct his feelings of indignation into constructive channels. (IB 818).

Proverbs says, "Wrath is cruel; anger is outrageous" (P27:4). Just as the phrase 'outrageous' suggests an overwhelming flood, anger also is an outrageous passion. According to P25:28, "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls". Here the imagery of a defenceless city lacking walls, conveys powerfully the utter vulnerability of an angry man. C.Bridges calls anger "a fit of passion, soon over and forgotten ... is a temporary madness which degrades human nature " (275).

"A quick-tempered man displays folly " (P14:29). A person who is even-tempered shows essentially a heroic spirit:

> He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city (P16:32).

Kenneth Barber interprets this verse as follows:

> Although one who practises patience and self-control receives far less attention and acclaim than a warrior who takes a city, he accomplishes better things (NIV 969).

The temperate person is essentially tolerant: "The discretion of a man defereth his anger but it is his glory to pass over a transgression " (P19:11).

George Lawson remarks:

> Anger is a more ungovernable monster than the leviathan and needs much more than a double barrel for curbing it (201).

Anger is destructive like a storm that rages for a while, inflicting great ruin in its wake: "A wrathful man stirreth up strife but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife" (P15:18). For the sake of emphasis, Solomon reiterates the same idea again: "An angry man stirreth up strife and a furious man aboundeth in transgression" (P29:22). On this aspect of anger, C.Bridges remarks:

> How many murders do we owe to this paroxysm of the moment! But for the divine restraints, the very foundation of society would be torn up (495).

Hence, the Jewish sage advises his readers to avoid any association with an angry man:

> Make no friendship with an angry man and with a furious man, thou shall not go, lest thou learn his ways and get a snare to thy soul (P22:24,25).

Hence, it is wise to avoid bad friends as Kenneth Barber says:

> "Bad Company corrupts good manners" (NIV 977).
> It is better to dwell in the wilderness than with a contentious and an angry woman (P21:19).

Tiruvalluvar also thinks in similar terms:

> Domestic life with those who don't agree
> Is dwelling in a shed with snake for company
> (T. 890).

The above **kural** may be interpreted as follows:

> A contentious wife leads you to a tight spot and life with her is like living with a snake in a closed pot.

Tiruvalluvar regards anger as "the killer of the person who succumbs to it" (T. 305), for "anger kills both laughter and joy" (T 304), and like fire ruins the things on which it falls: "Wrath, the fire that slayeth whoso draweth near, Will burn the helpful raft of kindred near" (T. 306). Further, "fountains of evil spring from anger" (T. 303), and those who eschew anger are greater than sages who renounced the pleasure of the world: "Truly great is the excellence of those who are free from pride, anger and lust" (T1. 431). Moreover, a man of self-control is assured of personal security:

Virtue, seeking an opportunity will come into the path of that man who, possessed of learning and self-control, guards himself against danger (T 130).

Such a man remains a master of himself and acquires all he desires:

'Tis virtue when, his footsteps sliding not
through envy, wrath,
Lust, evil speech-these four, man inwards
moves its ordered path (T 35).

Both the writers deal with the evil that befalls the angry. There are certain amazing parallels both in terms of content (**stoff**) and form (**gestalt**) when motifs are analysed in **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural**.

Further, if Solomon says, 'A wrathful man stirreth up strife' (P15:18), Tiruvalluvar asks rhetorically "What other foe to man works such annoy?" (T 304).

While, The Jewish wisdom writer says "A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment" (P19:19), the Tamil sage observes:

The hand that smites the earth unfailing feels
the sting,
So perish they who nurse their wrath as noble
thing (T 307).

Solomon advises his readers to defer anger as "the man that is soon angry dealeth foolishly" (P14:17) and "the man who is slow to wrath is of great understanding" (P14:29), and Tiruvalluvar asserts: "Men of surpassing wrath are like the men who are dead" (T.310) and so everyman should "preserve his soul from wrathful fires" (T.309). While the wisdom writer instructs his readers not to use "grievous words which stir up anger" (P 15:2) and "not to make friendship with an angry man" (P.22:24), Tiruvalluvar conveys something akin to this when he talks of the woe caused in 'kindred near' by an angry man. Thus, both the writers hold kindred views regarding the evil consequences of anger.

Envy is another vice which both the wisdom writers condemn in unison. Talking of envy, Bacon observes: "It takes no holidays" (Selby ed.23). The Wisdom writer poses a rhetorical question on almost the same truth: "Who is able to stand before envy?" (P27:4). To Solomon, envy makes "a person pine and cause rottenness of bones" (P14:30). George Lawson paraphrases this verse as follows:

> The envious man is impoverished by another's riches and tormented by another man's happiness .... He is not only disfigured by his evil eye but pines away under a distemper

> that consumes his bones and is a greater enemy to himself than any other man (**Commentary on Proverbs** 202).

Further, the Jewish sage exhorts the youth "not to envy the oppressor" (P3:31), "the wicked" and "the sinner" (P23:17), as they all bring about destruction upon themselves.

Aeschylus says in **Agamemnon:**

> Few are they who have such inborn grace as to look up with love and envy not when stands another on the heights of weal. (Charles W.Eliot ed. Harvard Classics, VIII 34).

Charles T.Fritsch suggests that

> the way to combat such an attitude is to determine never to glorify in the misfortunes of others as one never builds oneself up by tearing other people down (IB, 933).

However, the only effective antidote for envy is love as St.Paul puts it; "Love knows no jealousy" (I **Corinthians** 13:4).

Enumerating the evil consequences of envy, Tiruvalluvar exalts an "unenvying grace of mind" as something in accordance with "strict decorum's laws"

(T 161), and as "the richest gift" (T 162), for envy destroys all the material prosperity of the envious, ruining their body and life.

> Envy embodied ill, incomparable bane,
> Good fortune slays and soul consigns to fiery pain (T 168).

Envy destroys not only the envious man but also his children. The envious man loses all happiness, even when he faces not a single enemy. According to Tiruvalluvar, none grows richer by envying and none loses anything by being free from envy:

> Envy they have within! Enough to seal their fate
> Though foemen fail, envy can ruin consummate (T 165).

In Hindu mythology, the elder sister of the Goddess of Fortune is Misfortune, who is in charge of bad luck. The man who "sees good gifts given to others with an envious eye will utterly perish in poverty" (T 166);

> From envious man good fortune's goddess turns away,
> Grudging him good, and points him out misfortune's prey (T 167).

Solomon is quite precise in his remarks on envy but Tiruvalluvar touches upon each and every consequence of the man who indulges in it. Envy causes "ill deeds of foul disgrace" (T 164); "ruins a man's wealth in this world and drives him into the pit of fire" (T 168), in the next.

Social consciousness consists in avoiding this corrosive feeling of envy which strangles all activity and leads man to his doom:

> To men of envious heart, when comes increase of joy,
> Or loss to blameless men, the 'why' will thoughtful hearts employ. (T 169).

Parithiyar considers that the two conditions referred to in the above **kural**, "are momentary as the envious cannot remain prosperous for long." Kalingar, another Commentator, affirms that such a sight is merely an empty show for things are different at the very roots. T.P. Meenakshi Sundaram says,

> When one without stopping with mere jealousy, proceeds somehow to get others' possessions, this will lead to endless evil. Therefore, the root must be destroyed, the root of covetousness (72).

According to Solomon, Envy is generated in a man when he "covets greedily" (P21:26). James Caroll Tollett comments:

> 'Covet' means desire or lust. It is not the wanting of something that is wrong but wanting at the expense of others or from a motive of jealousy or envy (BSFL 112).

Covetousness is referred to as "idolatry" in **Ephesians** 5:5 and as "the root of all evil" in I **Timothy** 6:9. Covetousness is a bringer of misfortune not only to the possessor but also to the entire family:

> He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye and
> Considereth not that poverty shall come upon him (P28:22).

"A greedy man brings trouble to his family, but he that hates bribes will live" (P15:2). Envy also "takes away the lives of those who get ill-gotten gain" (P1:19) and "induces a false sense of security and often damages the character of its possessors" (IB 843).

Interestingly, the Wisdom writer instructs the youth to

> Labour not to be rich; cease from thine own wisdom. With thou set thine eyes upon that

> which is not? for riches certainly make to themselves wings, they fly away as an eagle toward heaven (P23:4,5).

Proverbs says that only the man "who hateth covetousness prolongeth his days " (P28:16).

With regard to **Tirukkural**, it holds a similar view: "Greatness of soul that covets not shall triumph still" (T.180). Tiruvalluvar roundly condemns covetousness which deprives a man of inner peace and freedom:

> Men free from strong desires are free
> None other share such perfect liberty (T.365).

Such men are those who "desire not others' good even in the hour of the sorest need" (T.174). To such persons, "Good Fortune draws nigh in ... time of need" (T 179).

Pride, in Hebrew etymology, "is *'gea'*, used for arrogance of those who must have everything their own way and will not be kicked around" (Derek Kidner 90). "Pride, which usually goes before a fall, is *'gaon'* or swelling excellence which is rejected in favour of the lowly spirit" (**The New Bible Dictionary** 966).

It is interesting to note that the Greek teaching during the last four centuries B.C. was totally at variance

with Judaism with regard to pride, as the former school held pride as a virtue and humility, despicable. Commenting on this, W.Graham Scroggie says,

> Haughtiness and humility are poles asunder; so are their goals - ruin and reward. (**The Scripture Union Daily Notes** 37).

Also, as a consequential corollary, inordinate pride expresses itself in inordinate self-esteem in the presence of God and man, which ultimately brings ruin. "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" (P16:18).

"Everyone that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord ... he shall not be unpunished". (P16:15) "The Lord scorneth the scorners; but He giveth grace unto the lowly" (P3:34).

From the above verses, it becomes quite clear that the proud cannot escape punishment ultimately. The Jewish sage dwells at length on the evil effects of pride. By "pride cometh contention" (P13:10); "destruction and a fall" (P16:18); and "Shame" (P11:2) and pride "shall bring him low" (P29:23). Commenting on this, Charles T.Fritsch says, "Pride produces instability and prevents growth" (945). Rolland Schloerb remarks in this context, that pride even makes a man ignore God's omnipotence:

> The conceited man lacks the profound self-knowledge that he is dependent on God .... A humble man recognizes his creaturehood (946).

So the Israelite sage says, "Better it is to be of a humble spirit" (P16:19). As for God, "surely he scorneth the scorners but he giveth grace unto the lowly" (P3:34). C.Bridges points to the blessings on the lowly, employing an imagery from Nature:

> His sweet dews and showers of grace slide off the mountains of pride and fall on the low valleys of humble hearts and make them pleasant and fertile (52).

Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount underscores the significance of humility: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of God" (Matthew 5:3). St.Peter observes,

> Young men ... be submissive to those who are older. Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another because God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble (I Peter 5:5).

The proud do not have longevity. "The Lord will destroy the house of the wicked" (P15:29), and hence, it is "better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud." (P16:19).

The root meaning of the noun for "humility" is "to be bowed down" (Charles T.Fritsch 907). "With the lowly is wisdom" (P11:2) as "before honour is humility" (P 18:12), and "by humility and fear of the Lord are riches, and honour and life" (P12:4). To George Lawson, "Humility and fear of the Lord are straight road to everything desirable" (376).

Tiruvalluvar is also equally opposed to egoistic pride, assigning godly virtue to the lowly:

> Who kills conceit that utters 'I' and 'mine'
> Shall enter realms above the powers divine
> (T 348).

He affirms, "More lofty than a mountain will be the greatness of that man, who without swerving from his domestic state controls himself" (T 124). Humility is the greatest wealth:

> To all humility is goodly grace; but chief to them
> With fortune blessed, - 'tis fortune's diadem.
> (T 125).,

and

> Greatness humbly bends, but littleness always
> Spreads out its plumes, and loads itself with praise (T 978).

Tiruvalluvar shows also a significant grasp of the psychology of ordinary men:

Whenever distinction lights on some unworthy head
Then deeds of hearty insolence are bred (T 977).

Hence, "submission is the might of men of mighty acts." (T 985).

Further, the Jewish wisdom writer contends that one should be careful in one's use of words as words are potent enough to hurt or heal one's hearers. Commenting on the vital need for the use of temperate language, Kenneth Barker says: "The ability to control the tongue is one of the clearest marks of wisdom" (NIV 963). To quote from Proverbs "He who restrains his lips is prudent" (P10:29).

A temperate use of language is a mark of wisdom and promotes prosperity, amity and longevity:

> A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth (P 12.14);
> A wholesome tongue is a trace of life but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit (P 15:4); and
> Death and life are in the power of the tongue and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof (P 18:21).

In contrast, "Evil words tend to death, good words to life, to the comfort of the speaker as well as to the blessing of the hearer" (EOP 262). To Charles T.Fritsch, "the perverseness of the tongue breaks or crushes the spirit of the man to whom or about whom evil things are spoken" (IB 868). Words can cause deadly hurt or heal a suffering mind: "There is that speaketh like the piercing of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health" (P12:18), and "he who guards his lips preserves his life but he who opens wide his lips - it is ruin to him" (P13:3).

Hence, "words are dynamites; they can destroy people. They should be carefully weighed before they are spoken " (**The Family Devotional Study Bible** 553).

Proverbs also enumerates "the sweetness of lips which increases learning" (P16:21) and "causes sweetness to the soul and health to the bones" (P16:24). If a wise, temperate use of language brings to the speaker considerable blessings, so does silence on the appropriate occasions, according to the following **Proverbs**:

> Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue,
> keepeth soul from troubles (P21:23);
> When words are many, sin is not absent,
> But he who holds his tongue is wise. (P10:19).

It is interesting to note that Tiruvalluvar also accords a high priority to a "restrained tongue":

> Whate'er they fail to guard, o'er lips men guard should keep;
>
> If not, through fault of tongue, they bitter tears shall weep (T 127).

Moreover, "pleasant words are words with all-pervading love that burn " (T 91).

"A man of sweet words will never suffer sorrow or increasing poverty" (T 94). In such a man of wise words, "The power of vice declines and virtues grow" (T 96). Temperate language "will yield righteousness for this world and merit for the next world" (T 97). "Why harsh unripe words, neglecting the available sweet ripe fruits of pleasing words?" (T 100).

Tiruvalluvar condemns outright, the man who uses profitless words: A man of vain words is considered as "Chaff of humanity" (T 196); and as one "who never righteous wisdom gains" (T 193); as such, vain words "To none delight afford and sever men from good" (T 194).

"Gone are both fame and boasted excellence" (T 195) from a man who uses a profitless tongue. The wise "speak none but words of deep significance" and "not even in thoughtless hour, speak words of vanity" (T 199).

In this context, T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram observes,

> The sweet words announce to others the coming in of the spring of love (65).

Hence, it is necessary to cherish the right use of language.

The Israelite sage warns the youth of the evils of drinking intoxicating liquor:

> Be not amongst winebibbers, among the riotous eaters of flesh.
> For the drunkard and glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags. (P23:20,21).

As for this addiction, "It biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder" (P23:32). John Garlock paraphrases the above verse thus:

> Wine is described as dangerous as a snake, producing hallucinations, bad language and insensitivity (914).

Moreover, in course of time, drunkenness will lead the drunkard to other vices. His "eyes shall behold strange women and his heart shall utter perverse things" (P23:33). To George Lawson, "The drunkard shall be punished not only for drunkenness but for a countless

multitude of sins to which the vice leads the way " (**Commentary on Proverbs** 414).

Liquor may provide a man with a momentary excitement and a temporary escape from pain but lands him in permanent misery. To Rolland Schloerb, "This form of escape means only jumping from the frying pan into the fire" (IB, 916). The Wisdom writer cautions a potential victim saying: "Do not look at the wine when it is red" (P23:31).

Tiruvalluvar also dwells at length on the painful consequences of drunkenness. He says that the lover of the palm's intoxicating juice "commands no reverence" and "their glory fades away" (T 921); and "all good men's esteem is lost" by the drunkard (T 922). Further, he considers drunkenness as "a grievous sin":

> Shame, goodly maid, will turn her back for aye on them
> Who sin the drunkard's grievous sin, that all condemn (T 924).

"Those who drink intoxicating draughts quaff poison" (T 926), and only the ignorant would "buy self-oblivion with gift of goods" (T 925), and become their townsmen's jest" (T 927). Further, "The drunkard's joy is sorrow to his mother's eyes; What must it be in the presence of the truly wise?" (T 423).

Every progressive individual aspiring for advancement in life, is earnestly exhorted to avoid liquor as it ruins his reason and reputation.

Dr. E.S.Muthuswami observes:

> Vallluvar's Chapter ***Kaḷḷuṇṇāmai*** or "Abstention from Palm Wine" is indeed a radical departure from the Sangam culture in which drinking toddy formed part of a normal way of living. An open toddy jar and a slaughtered sheep were "considered as a sign of prosperity" (**Puranānūru** 115). ... Perhaps it was the Jain influence that made Valluvar more moralistic and prohibit drinks as a social evil and as an individual weakness (**Tamil Culture As Revealed in Tirukkural** 95).

Even today, the consequences of this evil habit have been emphasized by Rt. Rev. Leslie Strading, Bishop of Johannesburg: "It is a contributor to the physical, mental and spiritual deterioration of man" (Quoted in **Tmt. Sornammal Endowment Lectures** 747).

Both the writers condemn it as a sin against oneself and the society, and stress the need for total abstinence.

The Wisdom writer considers the drunkard 'a fool', and Tiruvalluvar deems him "the ignorant of all that man should prize" (T925). Solomon says, "Wine is a mocker and beer, a brawler, whoever is led astray by them is not wise" (P20:1).

In **Proverbs**, the Israelite sage hints at the poverty which overtakes the drunkard: "He that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich" (P21:17), he "shall come to poverty" (P23:21). As Tiruvalluvar says, "To the man given over to strong drink, the light of Fortune shines no more" (T920).

The Wisdom writer advises the youth to shun the companionship of the drunkard. "Be not among winebibbers" (P23:19). He recommends a strong drink to the man who is about to perish or has a heavy heart: "Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember misery no more" (P31:6,7). C.Bridges comments: "Many a sinking spirit may be revived and forget his misery under a well-timed restorative" (525). But such indulgences and excitements are not fit for kings. The Jewish wisdom writer realizes that wine is the gift of God. It makes the heart of man glad. Tiruvalluvar does not hint at this aspect at all. Both the writers in

question deal with the same aspect of self-oblivion caused by drunkenness:

> Thine heart shall utter perverse things (P23:33);
>
> What in thy mind lies hid shall soon be known abroad (T 928)

and

> They have beaten me and I felt it not (P23:35)

Tiruvalluvar also refers to the drunken state as "self-oblivion" and condemns drinking in secret: "No more in secret drink and then deny thy hidden fraud" (T 928). Tiruvalluvar's injunction is unequivocal: "Drink not inebriating draught. Let him count well the cost" (T 922).

It is interesting to note that several of the verses in **Proverbs** concerning the evil of drunkenness open with the rhetorical mode of questioning:

> who hath woe? who hath sorrow?
> who hath contentions? who hath babbling?
> who hath wounds without cause?
> who hath redness of eyes? (P23:29, 30).

Such a rhetorical device seems to have been deliberately employed by Tiruvalluvar also, as he anticipates no valid counter-argument to some of his views:

> When one, in sober interval, a drunken man espies,
> Does he not think, 'such is my folly in any revelries? (T930).

The Jewish work of wisdom warns everyone against the evil of gluttony. **Proverbs** instructs the readers not to join riotous eaters of flesh, "for the drunkard and glutton will come to poverty" (P23:20,21). Citing these, George Lawson observes:

> By riotous eating of flesh or anything else, our bodies are disabled from doing their duty or have their vigour impaired and the seeds of weakness and drowsiness and disease sown in them, we sin against our own souls and bodies (407).

If **Proverbs** cautions us against excess with regard to eating, **Tirukkural** advocates the cause of vegetarianism. Any one who consumes other creatures' flesh in order to feast his own flesh "does not possess kindness" (T251), and "joy" (T253). Anticipating the argument that "we eat the slain; by us no living creatures die," the Tamil sage poses the question: "Who'd kill and sell, if none came there, the flesh to buy?" (T256). In order to discourage non-vegetarianism, he refers to the flesh eaten deliberately

as "other beings' ulcerous wounds" (T 257). He instructs "not to eat the bodies men of life bereave" (T 258). All living things with clasped hand adore the feet of non-killers "Not to kill and eat the flesh of an animal is better than pouring forth of ghee in a thousand sacrifices" (Tl 259).

If the Wisdom writer denounces gluttony which leads to torpor, Tiruvalluvar denounces the habit of eating flesh:

> What is the work of virtue? 'Not to kill';
> For 'killing' leads to every work of ill.
> (T 321),
>
> You ask what is the good and perfect way?
> 'Tis the path of him who studies not to slay.
> (T 324).

Dwelling on the need for protection of animals, Dr.M.Aram remarks how

> The chief of all virtue is not to mean harm even in mind, even in the least degree at any time to any person (**Tirukkural: Its Relevance for the modern world** in **Tmt. Sornammal Endowment Lectures** 436).

It is little wonder that the Jains claim Tiruvalluvar as their own, especially, on account of his stress on vegetarianism and pacifism. The author of **Proverbs**

comes down heavily against the sluggard but exploits the occasion to highlight certain serious lessons. The sluggard's only exercise is turning on his bed. **Proverbs** says that he is hinged to it (P 26:14). Any far-fetched excuse like "there is a lion in the sheets" (P 26:13), is enough to keep a sluggard from going to work and "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest and poverty will come on you like a bandit" (NSV 24:33).

Poverty is also like a robber ready to pounce on the sluggard: "The sluggard's craving will be the death of him because his hands refuse to work" (NSVP 21:25). "The way of slothful man is as hedge of thorns" (P15:19). Derek Kidner makes the following comment on the sluggard:

> He is restless with unsatisfied desire, helpless in the face of the tangle of his affairs which are like the hedge of thorns
>
> (**The Proverbs** 43).

He is useless to anyone who employs him: "He that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster" (P18:9). In this context, Derek Kidner observes:

> Through shirking hard work, he has qualified for drudgery and through procrastination, the disorder of life (43).

Laziness is strongly censured by the Hebrew sage:

> I went by the field of the slothful and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding. And lo, it was all grown over with thorns and nettles had covered the face thereof and the stonewall thereof was broken down (P24:30, 31).

Hence, the relevance of instruction given by Solomon:

> Go to the ant, you sluggard,
> consider her ways and be wise. (P6:6)

Commenting on this, John Garlock observes:

> The industrious insects' instinct shames lazy humanity. **Proverbs** condemns the sluggard's passivity, lack of initiative, the habit of procrastination, oblivion to the dire results and lack of discipline. (892).

The Wisdom writer advocates hard work and industry: "He that gathereth by labour shall increase" (P13:11). In other words, "diligence is the ordinary path to advancement" (C.Bridges 137).

Tiruvalluvar also despises sluggishness, describing it as "the death of effort" (T.602), which may ruin "the house from which he springs" (T 603); "His family decays and faults unheeded thrive" (T.604); "no

yield of good obtain" (T 606) and "shall bear reproofs and words of just contempt" (T 607), eventually rendering him "a slave of his enemies" (T 608).

Tiruvalluvar asserts that any "strenuous effort ... gives prevailing power" (T 611). A man of action "wipes away his kinsmen's grief and stands as the pillar of their might" (T 615). "Effort brings fortune's sure increase, Its absence brings to nothingness" (T 618).

In sluggishness is seen misfortune's lurid form, the wise declare;
Where man unslothful toils, she of the lotus flower is there (T 617).

Though fate divine should make your labour vain
Effort its labour's sure reward will gain (T 619).

Thus, even the course of **Karmā** can be diverted:

The man of energy, of soul inflexible,
Good fortune seeks him out and comes a friend to dwell (T 594).

and so "Firmness of soul in man is real excellence" (T 600).

In respect of handling one's own finances, the Jewish Wisdom writer warns against the evils of

suretyship, while Tiruvalluvar dwells at length on the dire consequences of gambling:

> My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, ... thou art snared with the words of thy mouth .... Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter and as a bird from the hand of the fowler (P6: 1,2,5).

Tiruvalluvar warns the youth against the evils of gambling, which is as old as the age of **Mahabhārata**:

> Gambling is Misfortune's other name; o'er whom she casts her veil,
> They suffer grievous want, and sorrows sore bewail (T 936).

> Ancestral wealth and noble fame to ruin haste
> If men in gambler's halls, their precious moments waste (T 937).

> Gaming brings many woes and ruins fair renown;
> Nothing to want brings men so surely down (T 934)

and

> Gambling wastes wealth, to falsehood bends the soul; it drives away
> All grace, and leaves the man to utter misery a prey (T 938).

In the case of a gambling prince, "treasure and revenue will pass from him away" (T 933).

Both the works deal with a series of moral virtues that are indispensable for the welfare of the individual and the governance of the community.

Another social virtue which has been stressed in **Tirukkural** is hospitality, which is conspicuously absent in **Proverbs**. Tiruvalluvar deals with hospitality in elaborate terms, like the benefits of hospitality in this life; those in the life after death; the evils of its neglect and the need for exercising a cheerful hospitality:

> The pleasures and the greatness of sharing of the food with unexpected guests are described as a *velvi* or a great sacrifice (**Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar** 65).

Hospitality, being an eminent traditional virtue with the people of ancient Tamil Nadu, is accorded the pride of place in **Tirukkural**:

> All household cares and course of daily life
> have this in view,
> Guests to receive, with courtesy and kindly
> acts to do (T 81).

As the objective of domestic life is to protect the guests, the hospitable man is promised many blessings:

Who first regales his guest and then himself supplies,
O'er all his fields unsown, shall plenteous harvests rise (T 85);

and

With smiling face, he entertains each virtuous guest,
'Fortune' with gladsome mind, shall in his dwelling rest. (T 84).

and he is "a welcome guest to the inhabitants of heaven" (T 85).

Thus, a comparative study of **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** offers a unique perspective, with regard to the various motifs relating to social harmony in the two different cultures which figure prominently in these works. An analysis of the factors contributing to peace and prosperity in the private life of the individual and those promoting social harmony, shows that there have been certain amazing parallels between the concepts of good life, as viewed by the two thinkers who lived in such distant parts of the globe - one in the Middle East and the other in South India. Such a comparison also highlights certain unique features in personal and social ideals envisaged in the two societies.

The thematic motifs discussed above, show how **Proverbs** touches upon "every facet of human relationship and its principles transcend the bounds of time and culture" (**The Open Bible** 623).

In **Proverbs**, God-centred ethics are viewed in absolute terms and they are abstract, impersonal, objective and constant. Derek Kidner observes:

> Wisdom as taught here is God-centred and even when it is most down-to-earth, it consists in the shrewd and sound handling of one's affairs in God's world in submission to His will (13).

The ethics in **Tirukkural** are, on the whole, more realistic, and hence, at times, likely to be more variable. They are deliberately envisaged as negotiable for the ultimate good and harmony of the society, in the final analysis. There is a profound humanistic concern in **Tirukkural** which ignores the need for reducing all personal ethics to an absolute, uncompromising scale of values. In short, as Alexander Jones observes:

> Real wisdom is found in the fear of God which is the very foundation of true religion. The wisdom of the East may be called humanistic; the wisdom of Israel is humanism spiritualized (**The Jerusalem Bible** 729).

It may be worth the mention here that though God's name is, atleast indirectly evoked in **Tirukkural**, the work can be called, by and large, Man-centred whereas **Proverbs** is, in the most unequivocal terms God-centred. If the vision of **Proverbs** can be put in a nutshell as theistic humanism, that of **Tirukkural** can be called, in general terms, as existential humanism.

CHAPTER FIVE

CODES OF COURTLY CONDUCT

In the ancient world of the Jews and the Tamils, monarchy was the predominant form of Government in which the king, who was the head, constituted the apex of the organizational structure, and ministers and ambassadors in the court had a vital role to play, almost in the manner of the executive wing of the modern system of government. Hence, this chapter devotes itself to the analysis of the governmental structure of the ancient societies concerned, dwelling primarily on the norms laid down in respect of duties and responsibilities assigned to kings, counsellors and ambassadors who constituted the highest echelon of power in the respective states. In the words of Bruner H.,

> The court ethos is concerned with the orderly function of the administration, social justice and official position of the ruler (428).

The king was, *ipso facto*, the chief protector and saviour of his citizens, for it was he who ensured their welfare. Being the chief source of all authority in the land, the king was, virtually, the most dependable means of shelter in the event of any assault from the enemy. There can be little wonder that the virtues attributed

to the king in those primitive societies, were akin to those associated with God Himself. Most critics confirm the fact that citizens had a natural tendency to associate the king with God. As for the ancient Jews, "It is true that the anointed king stood in a special relationship to Yahweh " (Roland de Vaux 110).

Further, the wise men of the **Old Testament** looked with favour upon the monarchy as an ideal form of government, most beneficial to the citizens. The king, in turn, established his throne by virtue of his sense of righteousness, mercy and truth, rather than sheer pride of inheritance through birth. In order to be an effective administrative head of a large administrative machinery, the monarch had to depend upon the wisdom and loyalty of his courtiers, among whom ministers and ambassadors occupied the most prominent and responsible positions. In **Proverbs**, the wise counsellor and reprover is described as an earring of gold or ornament of gold. The ministers in Solomon's court were assigned duties, much similar to those of the ministers in ancient Tamil Nadu, who also had the primary responsibility of safeguarding the interests of the king and the country through their wise counsel, couched either in a pleasing language or at times, in the form of indignant reproaches whenever the king erred.

According to Weisstein, "for Comparative Literature, *'stoff'*, 'theme' and *'topos'* are of considerably greater interest than for example 'motif' and 'situation'", and according to M.H.Abrams,

> A motif is an element - a type of incident, a device or formula which recurs frequently in literature (101).

The common motifs taken up for analysis and comparison in this chapter, are those concerned with the personal and moral qualities of an ideal ruler and the vices to be eschewed by him, the exercise of power by the chief executive in the land and qualities expected of ministers and rulers.

In ancient Israel, as well as in Egypt, the king was considered to be a patron of wisdom, capable of making far-reaching decisions. Often, such decisions were made on the basis of the collective wisdom of the king as well as the highest officers who had the privilege of his ears. There was always an intimate connection between the king and the counsellors, even as Solomon and Tiruvalluvar highlight the indispensability of good counsel. Taking cognizance of the burden placed on the shoulders of the royalty, Bacon also holds quite a similar view:

> The wisest princes need not think it any diminution to their greatness or derogation to their sufficiency to rely upon counsel. (Selby ed 51).

This chapter aims at analysing the nature of kingship, the virtues to be cherished by a ruler and the vices to be shunned by him, the theory concerning the divine right vested on the kings, and the role of counsellors in relation to the kings, against their own respective cultural backgrounds.

In Greek, *Basileus* states that the responsibility of the legal hereditary ruler "is to guide the life of the people by his justice" (**New Bible Dictionary** 655).

The king's power is usually traced back to Zeus, the supreme God. Later, under Plato, "we find a movement towards the idea of the king as benefactor, whose will is law, leading up to the idea of the divine king in Alexander and Caesars". (655)

In the ancient Near East, kingship was considered "to have been established by the Gods in the initial cosmological ordering of existence" (**Peake's Commentary on the Bible** 449):

> In Egypt, the tendency was for the king or Pharaoh to be regarded as identical with the

> God, in Assyria, rather as representing the God (**New Bible Dictionary** 655).

Roland E.Murphy is of the view that the nation of Israel had its own political and sociological compulsions to acquire a king, a strong visible symbol of the primary source of power:

> Israel seems to have imitated Egypt in adopting the government of Kingship. In I **Samuel** 8:5, 20, we are explicitly informed that Israel had recourse to kingship in imitation of the surrounding nations (**The Jerome's Biblical Commentary** 488).

In Israel, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice. King Solomon was proverbial for his wisdom:

> And all Israel heard of the judgement which the king had judged and they feared the king; for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgement (I **Kings** 3:28).

In the view of Roland E. Murphy,

> In Israel, monarchy was established to conduct itself in relationship to the law and the Covenant of God (410).

The wisdom of God was looked upon as an eternal and divine quality, traditionally available to persons occupying special offices like princes, priests and prophets.

Proverbs singles out three kings on account of their merit and statecraft: Solomon (P1:1, 10:1); Hezekiah (P25:1) and Lemuel (P31:1). **The Old Testament** provides concrete evidence of the type of court officials, who functioned in Jerusalem. The list of the officials in Solomon's reign includes the offices of the priest, secretaries, recorders, commanders-in-chief and district government advisers to the king (I **Kings** 4:1-6). Though "**Proverbs** does not make any mention of political philosophy or administrative efficiency, it shows concern for what makes good government. Justice and fairness matter most " (**The Family Devotional Study Bible** 562).

Training was necessary for all such dignitaries, especially to the little world of lesser ministers who functioned in the highly organized kingdom of Solomon. Nevertheless, it is precisely in **Proverbs** that we find the Israelite sage's instruction for the court official "to train a worthy ruler and courtier." (Roland E. Murphy 442).

As an individual, the king should be an embodiment of mercy, truth and benevolence. These royal virtues make him equally benevolent and accessible in the eyes of all his subjects. They endear the royalty to the poor, the weak and the oppressed in society and inspire loyalty in the minds of all citizens who look upon the king, as a mighty source of protection in times of need.

The Jewish Wisdom writer speaks of political administration from a certain idealistic perspective. The ruler is expected to cultivate qualities that go with wise administration: "Mercy and truth preserve the king; and his throne is upholden by mercy" (P20:28). Commenting on the above verse, Prof. Toy makes the following observation:

> Truth involves faithfulness to all obligations; kindness is not merely mercy (compassion or clemency) but general benevolence (ICC 395).

The combination of the above two virtues constitute the basis of a character imbued with an attractive moral calibre.

The ideal ruler is thus portrayed as a benevolent despot who is most concerned with protecting the interests of his citizens and State. Further,

> Benevolence and kindness endear a king to his people, and encourage them to be loyal subjects. (Kenneth Barker 974).

If mercy and truth are ascribed to the ruler as personal virtues, they reveal themselves through the king's judgements, he, being the supreme executive of justice in the land. Such a king is bound to be exemplary in dispassionate judgement as well as scrupulous upholding of the right and honourable principles, and his judgements should also be inevitably tempered by mercy and truth. He is also likely to keep the citizens free from several needless sociological upheavals and external threats.

In **Proverbs**, King Lemuel's mother exhorts him to show kindness and mercy to the oppressed, weaker section of society:

> Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of
> all such as are appointed to destruction
> Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead
> the cause of the poor and needy (P31:8,9).

Commenting on the above verses, C.Bridges makes the following comment:

> Very soundly does the wise mother inculcate mercy upon her royal son. This is one of the pillars of the king's throne. (526).

It is an essential virtue for a king to maintain his popularity through his righteousness and mercy.

Such a concern for the needy is a constant theme in wisdom literature, perhaps born of a realization that "we share a common humanity and are vulnerable to the same misfortunes " (John J.Collins 68).

It is an abomination for kings to commit acts of wickedness, "for the throne is established by righteousness" (P16:12). The term 'justice' or righteousness is defined by Justinian in the following manner:

> Justice is the firm and continuous desire to render to everyone that which is his due (Quoted in IB 902).

A king lends stability to his nation through his deliverance of justice. "But a person who is greedy for bribes tears it down" (P29:4). Commenting on the imperative need for absolute justice, Prof. Toy says:

> The decision of the ideal king is as just as if God himself had given it. (ICC 324);

and

> This is an ideal set before a Hebrew king whose source of righteousness and wisdom is the true and living God. (IB 874) .

"The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever" (P25:14); When the king "judges the poor with fairness" (P29:4); "refuses to take bribes" (P29:4), and "removes all wicked advisers" (P25:5) from his court, his throne will get established in course of time.

In an ideal situation the king becomes almost a mouthpiece for the enforcement of God's law and order:

> A divine sentence is in his lips.
> His mouth transgresseth not in judgement
> (P16:10).

If the king were to earn the goodwill of all his citizens, he must live an exemplary life before them. Further, if he was to be an impartial upholder of justice, he must also be free from corruption in any form imaginable. Hence, the ruler is advised to desist from succumbing to the allurements of the flesh. In the words of the mother of King Lemuel,

"Give not thy strength unto women nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings" (P31:3). As can be easily perceived, "It is a warning against a large harem and sexual immorality" (Kenneth Barker 989).

David and Solomon landed themselves in great difficulties, because of their excessive susceptibilities to the charms of women. It is little wonder then that

the writer of **Proverbs** insists on the virtues of continence. As George Lawson rightly observes,

> Whoredom is the ruin of any man but none are in greater danger of being ruined in their bodies and fortunes by this vice than kings who have too often the misfortune to want a check or a reprover while the temptations that lead to sensuality are ever surrounding them (**Commentary on Proverbs** 556).

There is also a strong injunction against addiction to wine on the part of the royalty:

> It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine nor for princes strong drink lest they drink and forget the law and pervert the judgement of any of the afflicted (P31:4,5).

In the words of Lawson again,

> Wine as well as whoredom takes away the heart, when it is drunk to excess. (556).

A man addicted to liquor is liable to pervert judgement which may eventually lead to some unjust, inhumanitarian activity and neglect of duty, and land the drunkard in some irredeemable damages, thereby grossly reducing the stature of the leader in the eyes of his people.

Further, "the threefold warning against womanizing, drinking and injustice is specially for a ruler, not just for the general population." (Jack W.Hayford, 923).

The Wisdom writer is thus of the view that the wicked who are likely to corrupt the mind of the ruler should be driven away from his presence through judicial action. Only then shall the throne be established on righteousness. Hence, "The chief virtue of a ruler is to know his subjects" (Selby ed.54). In the words of Solomon:

> Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer.
> Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness. (P25:4,5).

When impurities are eliminated, gold becomes pure enough to be used in a jewel. Similarly, to establish a wise and beneficent government, wicked counsellors ought to be kept away from the royal presence:

> A wise king scattereth the wicked and bringeth the wheel over them (P20:26);

and

> As the husbandman's wheel, brought over the grain, cut the straw and separated the chaff, his sifting administration of justice brought

> the wheel of vengeance on the wicked and scattered them as worthless stuff or crushed them in ruin (C. Bridges, 313).

A suggestion to this effect is contained in the following verse:

> When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice;
> When the wicked rule, the people groan.
> (P29:2).

Further, the vast power vested in the king is visualized in terms of the imagery of an Eastern despot in **Proverbs**:

> The wrath of a king is as messengers of death but a wise man will pacify it (P16:14), and in the light of the king's countenance is life and his favour is as a cloud of latter rain (P16:14).

In his comment on the above verse, Charles Fritsch observes,

> In Eastern, even more than Western lands, the supreme court of appeal is the Sovereign in person (IB 842).

In the essay on 'Empire', Bacon writes:

> Princes are like heavenly bodies which cause good or evil times (Selby ed. 51).

That the king's power cannot be effectively challenged in any manner is contained in the statement: "fear the Lord and the king" (P24:21).

However, even in a society where the king is the sole dominating personality, he may pass at best, only for an ideal man. A king, however courageous, just or well-learned, can never hope to become a divine being. In other words, he is simply a guardian of **Dharmā** (virtue), filled with a sense of honour, justice and enthusiasm for the duties of kingship.

During Tiruvalluvar's period, South India was essentially a country of monarchical states and the king was invariably looked upon as a leader and protector in war. Hence, the qualities that **Tirukkural** attributes to a king are applicable to the head of any Republic as well. It is not uncommon to see a **kural** being quoted in the verdicts on certain vital issues of administration of the land even today, and in the courts of law in Tamil Nadu.

Dr. M. Varadharajan in **Tiruvalluvar** brings in an analogy from agriculture in order to establish the fact that Tiruvalluvar's ideas on statecraft have enough relevance in the modern context. In the olden days, agriculture depended upon bullocks for most of the

farming operations. The basic requirements of agriculture like fertile soil, monsoon, adequate sunlight and quality seeds remain the same down the ages, though several changes have occurred in respect of the implements used (**Tiruvalluvar allatu Vāḻkkai Viḷakkam**, 4)

Tiruvalluvar also discusses the most intricate problems of statecraft though, in all likelihood, he was not a politician or a man of the court. To him, **Dharmā** or "righteous" means "developing one's social consciousness " (T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram 70)

> Among the Hindus, **Dharmā** or righteousness was woven into general public life including government, so that any opposition to **Dharmā** was not only irreligious but also treasonable and so it could be put down with the authority which has the necessary public sanction, physical force and law on its side.
>
> (T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram 77).

Tiruvalluvar also emphasizes benevolence and kindness as the basic virtues on the part of the king:

> Whose heart embraces subjects all, lord over the mighty land;
> Who rules, the world his feet embracing stands. (T.544).

The king who wields his sceptre with love and sympathy, is implicitly obeyed by all his subjects:

> Since true benignity, that grace, exceeding great, resides
> In kingly souls, world in happy state abides
> (T 571).

On the other hand,

> the abundant wealth of the king whose words are harsh and whose looks are void of kindness will instantly perish instead of abiding with him (T.566).

Moreover,

> The world goes on its wonted way
> Since grace benign is there (T 572).

The world is the king's, if only he is capable of showing kindness, without watering down justice:

> Who can benignant smile, yet leave no work undone;
> By them as very own may all the earth be won
> (T 578).

While rendering justice, the ruler must be equitable, merciful, impartial and scrupulous. The Tamil sage compares the act of punishing the guilty to that of weeding in a garden:

By punishment of death the cruel to restrain
Is as when farmer frees from weeds the tender grain (T 550).

However, the ruler should take care that punishment is proportionate to the offence committed:

Harsh words and punishment severe beyond the right,
Are file that wears away the monarch's conquering might (T 567).

Further, the king is exhorted to win the hearts of people by "Being easy of access where no harsh word repels" (T386). Thus, Tiruvalluvar wisely affirms the view that the royalty should never alienate themselves from the affection and loyalty of their citizens.

In **Tirukkural**, administration of justice is deemed as an integral part of the sovereign's responsibility, and the king is looked upon as the supreme upholder of justice in the land:

Who guards the realm and justice strict maintains
That king as God o'er subject people reigns (T 388).

The importance accorded to the maintenance of justice can be apprehended from the following definition of justice:

Search out, to no one favour show; with heart that justice loves,
Consult, then act; this is the rule that right approves (T 541).

As if to underline his concept of justice, Tiruvalluvar employs another **kural**, which makes a categorical pronouncement of what justice is not:

Than one who plies the murderer's trade, more cruel is the king
Who all injustice works, his subjects harassing (T 551).

Here again, it is interesting to note that **Tirukkural** strongly advocates the cause of justice tempered with the tender, humane virtue of mercy. Though righteousness gives permanence to the government of a king, the citizens must constantly be assured of the former's benevolence and mercy. **Tirukkural** underlines further the need for the king to enjoy popularity and acceptability in respect of his subjects:

Righteous government gives permanence to kings,
Without that, their fame will have no endurance (T 556).

The supreme upholder of justice must also be utterly scrupulous and free from corruption. For, if a

king maintains himself in power by accepting bribes, he will soon ruin the morale of his people:

> Whose rod from right deflects, who counsel doth refuse,
> At once his wealth and people utterly shall lose (T 554).

Tiruvalluvar lays emphasis on the fundamental need to provide a royal dispensation of justice by highlighting all the evils that would befall a lord who neglects administrative justice:

> Where guardian guardeth not, udder of kine grows dry
> And Brahmans' sacred lore will all forgotten lie (T 560).

> Where king from right deflecting makes unrighteous gain,
> The seasons change, the clouds pour down no rain (T 559).

As a result, "the country will become a desert and the people uncivilized" (TPM 122). In short, when justice is denied, chaos will result in the inner and outer worlds of the individual citizen. No form of hierarchy or social order will be sustainable.

Thus, the king is admonished against the use of oppression and injustice in order to strengthen or consolidate his own power. Permanence of the leadership depends upon the size of population who remain loyal to him:

> No lance gives king's victory,
> But sceptre swayed with equity (T546).

Unless the king behaves like an embodiment of wisdom and impartial administration of justice, the moral basis of a meaningful life could not become a reality:

> All earth looks up to heaven whence raindrops fall;
> All subjects look to king that ruleth all (T542).

The king who wields his sceptre with love and sympathy is implicitly obeyed by his subjects, "the world his feet embracing stands" (T544). Because of the benign royal souls, "world in happy state abides" (T571). On the other hand, the wealth of the king who is void of kindness will instantly perish instead of abiding long with him (T566).

The king is exhorted to win the hearts of the people by being always approachable. When the ruler is equally accessible to all citizens and objectivity is

maintained with regard to issues of justice, the country will not only be stable but also flourish:

> Where the king is easy to access, where no harsh word repels,
> That land's high praises every subject swells
> (T 386).

With regard to the question of being susceptible to women's sexual appeal and liquor, the king is strongly cautioned against any such excessive indulgence, and reminded of his obligation to the poor and the weaker sections of society. The ruler should desist passion for any woman in life, including that for his own wife, where it concerns meeting the ends of social justice:

> Who to his wife submits, his strange, unmanly mood
> Will daily bring him shame among the good
> (T 903).

Consequently, any attachment to a public woman is likely to be much worse for what she desires is not the ruler's love but wealth. The ruler who is supposed to seek universal love should not fall a prey to the charms of harlots:

Their worthless charms, whose only weal is
wealth of gain
From touch of these the wise, who seek the
wealth of grace, abstain (T 914).

According to Tiruvalluvar, the three cardinal sins in respect of personal conduct to be eschewed by men, especially the royalty, are public women, liquor and gambling:

Women of double minds, strong drink and dice;
to these given over,
Are those on whom the light of Fortune shines
no more (T 920).

The course of Fortune is likely to deviate for the worse in respect of any man holding public office, if he becomes an addict to the habits of womanizing, drunkenness and gambling. **Tirukkural** also underscores the futility of reasoning with a drunkard, as no amount of logic will be of any use in such a situation:

Reasoning with a drunkard is like going under
water with a torch in search of a drowned man
(T 929).

The above couplet indirectly suggests also the far-reaching consequences of the habit of drinking in the case of a ruler. As the words or actions of drunkards

do not carry any moral weight, they are not far different from those associated with the dead:

> Sleepers are as the dead, no otherwise they seem;
> Who drink intoxicating droughts, they poison quaff, we deem (T 926).

Condemning the habits of womanizing and drunkenness, in the manner of the Jewish Wisdom writer, Tiruvalluvar goes on to decry also the nefarious habit of gambling, as another cardinal evil that leads a man to utter misery:

> Gambling wastes wealth, to falsehood bends the soul, it drives away
> All grace and leaves the man to utter misery a prey (T 938).

The above three evils in Tiruvalluvar's view, according to Murugesa Mudaliar,

> are not merely personal sins but gigantic public sins, affecting a wide circle of human beings directly and indirectly.
>
> (**Tmt.Sornammal Endowment Lectures** 754).

In Gandhiji's view also the duty of any modern State is to eliminate the above three evils of drink, damsels and dice. According to Tiruvalluvar, the king

should make every effort to seek constant counselling aid from wise men:

> The king, since counsellors are monarch's eyes,
> Should counsellors select with counselwise.
> (T.445).

In the age of Tiruvalluvar, the Tamil State had an elaborate system of spies, who kept the ruler informed of developments in the land. Commenting on this procedure, T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram remarks:

> It is necessary even in the interests of justice to know the truth about all people
> (**Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar** 123).

Tiruvalluvar justifies the system of spies, on the ground that the spies constitute the very "eyes of the king" (T.581). The king initiates any action only when three spies, unknown to each other, file a concurring report:

> One spy must not another see, contrives it so,
> And things by three confirmed as truth you know (T.589).

He also stresses incessant effort and diligence on the part of the ruler:

> Effort brings fortune's sure increase,
> Its absence to nothingness (T 616).

Tirukkural emphasizes the important fact that a ruler can never afford to rest on his oars:

> The king whose life from sluggishness is rid,
> Shall rule over all by foot of mighty gods
> bestrid (T 610).

Moreover, **Tirukkural** salutes the virtue of industry, saying that it has the potency to modify even the course of one's destiny: Perseverance and sustained effort will overcome even the course of **Karmā**:

> Delay, oblivion, sloth and sleep; these four
> Are pleasure boats to bear the doomed to
> ruin's chore (T 605).

The king is expected to be highly alert, energetic and lofty in mind, not given to procrastination: "Whatever you ponder, let your aim be lofty still" (T 596), as "the dignity of men is measured by their minds" (T 595).

Tiruvalluvar looks at Statecraft from the point of view of **Aram** which does not brook any expediency. While dealing with war, he stresses the necessity of acting with due deliberation, assessing one's own strength, opportune time, and the place of assault. T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram is of the view that the fact that "the well-trained army who have indomitable courage" (T 761), is

dealt with, immediately following the chapter on the State may indicate that "the king's army is mainly intended as a defensive force, not for any aggression" (179).

In **Tirukkural**, the ruler is looked upon as "the custodian of **Dharmā**" (TPM, 70). Tiruvalluvar does not seem to accept the Divine Right Theory, though in the following couplet, he concedes it partially in the form of a simile:

> Who guards the realm and justice strict maintains,
>
> That king as god o'er subject people reigns
>
> (T. 388).

Further, Tiruvalluvar refers to the king as *'irai'* which means God. Murugesa Mudaliar in his "Lecture on Polity" agrees with the view that the **kural** does not attribute divinity to the king though he possesses *'oli'* (light) in couplets, T.390, T.556 and T.698. This does not refer to "the 'halo' or the divine light but simply glory which the kingly state does bestow on an individual. It can never safely be asserted that Tiruvalluvar equates king with God." (**Tmt. Sornammal Endowment Lectures** 529).

Prof. A.S.Gnanasambandan's interpretation seems to suggest that it is the citizen who attributes divine aspects to an exemplary ruler:

> There is no Godhead in the king but if he behaves as expected of him, he will be looked upon as God (**Valluvar Vahutta Arasiyal** 170).

Viewed from the perspective of the ruler, Bacon's conception of the king seems to be only a vague echo to that of Tiruvalluvar, as the latter does not subscribe to any such 'divine' right:

> Remember that you are a man and remember that you are a God or God's vice regent (Selby ed.51).

Tiruvalluvar is also of the view that the wicked should be driven away from the ruler's presence. It is further pointed out that a king should study carefully whether a person has any inclination for riches, women or other kinds of pleasures and then choose him as his minister:

> How treats he virtue, wealth and pleasure?
> How, when life's at stake,
> Comforts himself? The four-fold test of man
> will full assurance make (T.501),

as wicked counsellors are quite likely to become agents of destruction of the state.

A large number of proverbs and **kurals** deal with the relationship of a king with his citizens. The king

was the centre of power in that age, who ensured political order and social stability. Hence, he must possess the virtues of mercy, benevolence, truth, justice, and love for the weak and the oppressed. Further, he should befriend wise counsellors, and eschew sexual immorality, incontinence, drinking, injustice, etc. Like the Wisdom writer, Tiruvalluvar also feels that learning and wisdom are quite essential for a king. In the ultimate analysis, Tiruvalluvar's portrayal of the king is that of a benevolent despot, who exists for protecting the interests of the citizens and the State, and, significantly, **Tirukkural** exhibits a pronounced bias favouring the people, rather than the king. The emphasis in the Tamil work of wisdom is on the duties of the ruler rather than on his rights. In contrast, **Proverbs** simply upholds the Divine Right of kings. Tiruvalluvar accords to the king merely the status of the custodian of **Dharmā**, which has definite transcendental implications.

According to Solomon, the king should heed the voice of good counsellors:

> Where no counsel is, the people fall; but in the multitude of counsellors, there is safety (P11: 4);

and

> Every purpose is established by counsel (P20:18).

Thus, the safety of the king and the kingdom rests on good counsel.

The term *'tahbuloth'* in Hebrew means "skill or guidance, and conveys etymologically, the concrete image of rope-pulling for the purpose of steering a ship" (C.Bridges 27). The original sense of nautical expertise is transposed to the political domain which demands skill and insight in finding solutions and offering timely advice to leaders. In the context of a sagacious discourse, the term denotes the art of solving problems and meeting challenges that face the body-politic requiring experience and intuition in matters of battle strategy, diplomacy and negotiation. Hence, the Wisdom writer says,

> For by wise counsel, thou shalt make thy war; and in multitude of counsellors there is safety (P24:6).

On the other hand, if too many counsellors are given a chance to speak, action may get delayed and confusion may set in:

> However, in the give and take of group thinking, something generally emerges that is better than the conclusion that any one person could have produced by himself (IB 848).

Wars are won by wisdom. The Hebrew term *'teshulah'* or victory means basically deliverance, implying that "where there is deliverance from enemy, there is victory and thus safety" (IB 848). By employing proper counsellors, the king is more likely to ensure the safety of the land.

Even Aristotle is of the opinion,

> The most desirable form of government is that which enables everyman, whoever he is, to exercise his best (S.H. Butcher, trans. **Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art** PXII).

Further, it is the duty of those who have the ears of the kings, to give faithful and just counsel and to tell them the much needed, though at times displeasing, truth. In doing so, they will eventually gain royal favour, while flatterers may end up as objects of justifiable abhorrence.

"Righteous lips are the delight of kings and they love him that speaketh aright" (P16:13). The king loves trustworthy advisers:

> A wicked messenger falleth into mischief;
> But a faithful ambassador is health (P13:17)

In the opinion of Oesterley,

> Both the Hebrew and the Egyptian sages are referring to the envoy who was an important government official or to a scribe who was classified as one of the wisemen from the earliest times because he could write and therefore hold a responsible position (103).

Wise conduct is enjoined before a king in court (P25: 8-10), in speech (P25: 11-18) and in dealing with enemies (P25: 19-22):

> Do not go hastily to court, for what will you do in the end when your neighbour has put you to shame? Debate your case with your neighbour, and do not disclose the secret to another, lest he who hears it expose your shame and your reputation be ruined. (NKJ P25:8-10).

Prof. C.H.Toy interprets the above verse as

> Go not forth to strive hastily of thy neighbour's affairs with thoughtless impropriety, lest thou know not what to do (ICC 461).

Discussing a disputed matter in private and trying to settle it then and there, is preferable to taking it to

court. Also, it is better to maintain silence concerning other people's matters because a babbler is universally despised. Above all, a counsellor should utter the right words at the right time and context:

> A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver (P25:11).

Further, to be able to receive wise counsel is considered as valuable as connoisseurship of jewellery:

> As an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear (P25:11).

For instance, Job shows an acute awareness of the value of counsel, when he says: "How forcible are right words " (**Job** 6:25).

Fidelity is the most praiseworthy virtue in envoys, especially because they are not under the immediate eye of the masters:

> As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him, he refresheth the soul of his masters (P25:13).

C. Bridges explicates the above verse in the following manner:

> The cold of snow would be most refreshing to the parched and fainting reapers. So is the faithful messenger to them that sent him.
> (**EOP**, 403).

A king should also never put his confidence in an undependable man during a crisis, which is "like a broken tooth and a foot out of joint " (P25:19). As John Garlock observes, "The pain is both acute and chronic" (**Bible for Spirit-Filled Living**, 917).

Similarly, an unfaithful messenger can cause untold misery:

> A wicked messenger falls into trouble but a trustworthy envoy brings healing (P13:17).

A good counsellor's soothing words bring about healing, as his tactful and honest approach benefits both the parties:

> By long forbearing is a prince persuaded and a soft tongue breaketh the bones (P25:15).

Patience and gentleness are powerful tools in such a situation:

> He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hearty of spirit exalteth folly. (P14:29).

According to C.Bridges,

> To be slow to wrath is a proof of great understanding .... There is often a sourness of spirit that sits upon men by which they are angry at they know not what; lighting into a flame at the most trifle matters, such as in cooler moments we shall be ashamed at having contended for terrible flames have arisen from these trifling sparks. This is indeed exalting folly on an eminence to be seen by all (173).

Another thing despicable in an ambassador is sluggishness:

> A sluggard ambassador is so despicable as vinegar to the teeth and as smoke to the eyes (P10:26).

Such an incompetant ambassador is as irritating as vinegar and smoke. Here John Garlock makes the following comment:

> A lazy employee is not only unproductive but also irritating (**Bible for Spirit-filled Living**, 897).

So also "the king's favour is toward a wise servant; but his wrath is against him that causeth

shame" (P.14:35). In sharp contrast, a diligent man is honoured by the king and respected by his subjects:

> Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men (P22:29).

Speedy execution of a king's command is a virtue that the writer of **Proverbs** appreciates by instinct. The king's search for the most diligent and capable men of the realm in order to place them over certain affairs of the kingdom. C.Bridges remarks: "The diligent man will bear rule in his own sphere " (EOP 365).

In the case of Tiruvalluvar, he assigns, to start with, ten couplets for discussion of the role of ministers in **Porutpal** (Materialistic Sphere) which underscores the significance of counsellors. According to Murugesa Mudaliar, a modern critic,

> The minister is a part of five grand councils, i.e. ministers, astrologers, military chiefs, envoys and scouts and eight popular assemblies, i.e. assemblies of citizens, guardsmen, workers, treasurers, frontiermen, etc. and the minister has constantly to speak to them (**Tmt. Sornammal Endowment Lectures** 598).

In short,

> It was a society which relied on learned assemblies and councils in local and central governments. (TPM. 125).

Counsellors are referred to as "monarch's eyes" (T 445), a fact which implies the indispensability of the learned and wise executive arm of the State, in safeguarding the interests of the king and the country, either through "suggesting in a pleasing manner things such as are desirable and not disagreeable" (T 696); or "thundering out reproaches when the king errs" (T 447).

A king who would endure bitter words of reproach is, in the final analysis, safe and secure and "beneath the shadow of his power, the world abides secure " (T 389). This view of Tiruvalluvar is expressed in another **kural** that ends up with a rhetorical question, for emphasis:

> What power can work his fall, who faithful ministers
> Employs that thunders our reproaches when he errs? (T447).

The most important counsel that Tiruvalluvar proffers to the minister of a king is that he ought to dare "to say the very truth aloud though unwise kings

may cast his words away" (T 638), at times, even at the cost of his own security or position. The minister should never waver in his mission of offering the right counsel and must possess incisive insight, ready apprehension of issues involved, clarity in formulating a resolution and a strong will to initiate and execute the necessary action.

Further, the minister ought to be a great diplomat in international politics so as "to utter calm, conclusive word whenever needed" (T 634). V.V.S.Aiyar interprets this clause, as "the positiveness in expression of opinion", which is possible, "only in a responsible minister who deliberates deeply and speaks discreetly" (T 595). That Tiruvalluvar places a great prize on unambiguity in speech in a monarchy is a pointer to the fact that "Tiruvalluvar was really anticipating the modern concepts of democratic process." (**Tmt. Sornammal Endowment Lectures** 595).

Only good counsels can offer a king both stability and invincibility as he who "lacks support of friends knows no stability" (T 449). In the words of Bacon, "The life of the execution of affairs resteth in the good choice of persons." (Selby ed. 54).

While listing out the qualifications and role of ministers in the light of **Tirukkural**, Parimelazhagar is

of the opinion that ministers are "equal in weight to the king himself" (**Tmt. Sornammal Endowment Lectures** 594).

Tiruvalluvar gives prominence to "integrity and soul-determined truthfulness" (T 638), in the rulers. An ambassador sent on a mission should be firm of mind, pure of heart and engaging in his ways and words. He should have an abundant measure of "native subtlety combined with sound scholastic lore" (T 636) and "sense, goodly grace and knowledge exquisite" (T.684).

While elaborating on the most important aspect of a minister's professional art, Tiruvalluvar emphasizes oratory of speech,which perhaps constitutes a most salient asset of any leader in a modern democracy. Dr.Balasubramaniam is of the view that

> the art of eloquence is at once the symbol of democracy and the strength of a government .... The righteous and beneficial injunctions to be followed by the ministers and the need for them to cultivate and cleverly manipulate the art of rhetoric and practice of debate go to prove that in Valluvar's polity, the ministry was democratic.
>
> (**Tmt.Sornammal Endowment Lectures** 718).

Further, the minister has to "make his speech well-adapted to various hearers' state" (T 644), and his manner of delivery has to be such that it binds his friends to himself and makes even his rivals value his friendship. Being "mighty in word and fearless in speech" (T 647); the counsellor should "hold the listeners' ear spellbound" (T 643), "rightly speak the right" (T 641), in an affable manner, eschewing harsh words (T 685) since "gain and loss in life depend on speech" (T 642). For, those who are incapable of setting forth their accomplishments before others, are like "flowers blossoming in cluster and yet without fragrance " (T 650).

While analysing the office of the minister which, in the eyes of Tiruvalluvar involves a dynamic philosophy of action, T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram remarks:

> In the treatment of this intricate problem of diplomacy, he shows his greatness which arises again from his basic human approach (137).

After a thorough study of an issue, a minister should venture to suggest the right remedy, ever mindful of the need for timeliness of action and spirit of enterprise:

> A minister is he who grasps with wisdom large,
> Means, time, work's mode and functions rare he
> must discharge (T 631).

Moreover, the minister must have a "determined mind, interest in the welfare of the subjects, learned wisdom and manly effort" (T 632), in order to execute the plan.

An able minister must further possess the capacity to eschew sticky partners and reach out to even those who have been for a time estranged, if they are found valuable. In addition, whenever "action calls for sleepless care" (T 672), with "steadfast will and mind unslumbering" (T 668), he must show "firm resolve and do the deeds that pleasure yield at last" (T 669) and be constantly alert for seizing time by forelock under any circumstances, as "delays have dangerous ends" (**Henry** VI:Part I, III Act II Scene 1.33). Also Tiruvalluvar cites firmness of mind and tireless industry as the essential prerequisites of a minister, for it is the former virtue, which, when directed towards morally good ends, yields fruits, avoiding all pitfalls.

It is also significant that, to Tiruvalluvar, purity of means is extremely sacred:

> What has been obtained by fairness,
> Though with loss at first, will afterwards yield fruit (T 659).

and

> For a minister, to protect his king with wealth obtained by foul means is like preserving a vessel of wet clay by water (T 660).

The above **kurals** highlight how Tiruvalluvar values purity of purpose even in the sphere of diplomacy. To him, an ideal ambassador will never stoop to cunning or deceit, because he eventually believes in negotiating from a morally superior position of strength.

A man should never venture into an action that is apparently hopeless. However, if anything goes wrong in course of time, after he has thrown himself into an enterprise, he should remain calm and face the situation boldly:

> In action be thou' ware of act's defeat;
> The world leaves those who work leave incomplete. (T 612).

Moreover, he should think and decide on the right time for action:

> A crow will conquer owl in broad day light;
> The king that foes would crush needs fitting time to fight. (T 481).

The initiative of any action must remain always with the ruler: "He should think and then dare the deed" (T 467).

Tiruvalluvar insists that a minister should be thoroughly familiar with the ways of the world and must

have practical experience, for though a person has acquired all the bookish knowledge, it is of no avail if he does not "follow common sense of men in all" (T 637). For instance, Tiruvalluvar offers a pragmatic counsel where it concerns overcoming an enemy. One should simply bide one's time:

> If one meets his enemy, let him show him all respect until the time of destruction comes; when that comes, his head will be easily brought low (T 488).

In 'Conduct in the Presence of Kings', Tiruvalluvar suggests certain formulae: "They should, like those who warm themselves at the fire, be neither too far nor too near " (T1 691) For, "If the king's suspicion is once aroused, none can remove it, and he should avoid the commission of serious errors" (T1 692). He should steadfastly repress "all whispered words and interchange of smiles" (T 694), in the presence of the king, and should not be so inquisitive as "to seek and ask for the secret of the king, and give ears only if he lets the matter forth " (T 695).

A minister may be considered a gem among men and be regarded as a deity, if he has sufficient intuition and astuteness to read the unuttered thoughts of the king and scan the silent minds of men. He is also

expected to be loyal, humble and circumspect in the presence of the king, regardless of the age and nature of the monarch, for, if obedience to and respect for authority do not exist, there will be only chaos:

> Say not, 'He's young, my kinsman', despising thus your king;
> But reverence the glory, kingly state doth bring (T 698).

A minister, who, standing by the king's side plots evil, brings "worse woes than countless foemen" (T.639). As this **kural** is so strongly worded, it is obvious that Tiruvalluvar does not mince words on the question of betrayal. It is interesting to note Ilango Adikal, famous sage-author of the Tamil epic, **Silappatikaram**, places disloyal ministers in the same category as other degenerates like a rascal monk, unchaste women, seducers, liars and informers (**Sil** 5:128-131).

T.P. Meenakshi Sundaram is of the view that Tiruvalluvar's conception of the role of ministers is "worthy of study by members of assemblies of the modern world", as they lay emphasis on high ideals, while "giving us practical hints" (125). Thus, it goes without saying that the constitutional monarchy and democratic ministry in Valluvar's polity set a model

even to our own contemporary political structure and organization.

Solomon in **Proverbs** speaks for himself when he affirms that the king should be the friend of the gracious servant, by which he implies "purity of heart" or "moral influence of the purity of character", and place refinement over the whole character (C.Bridges 354).

With regard to the values and virtues of counsellors, both the Wisdom writers think in similar terms. The ministers should always offer wise counsel though it may be displeasing to the rulers at times. The virtues indispensable for the envoys in the presence of the king are truthfulness, loyalty, fidelity, diligence, gentleness, patience, forbearance, speedy execution of an action at the right time and right place, and, above all, a persuasive tongue. The vices to be eschewed are unfaithfulness, sluggishness, babbling and haste. Tiruvalluvar also offers practical counsel to the ministers regarding how to conduct oneself with one's foes or rivals - to show all courtesy until the time of their destruction. However, a good counsellor should never be mean or unscrupulous. In Valluvar's society, there is an all-pervasive influence

of **Aram** which listed out definitive do's and dont's regarding life public and private, and this ethical code enjoyed a great approbation.

The king depicted in **Proverbs** is a benevolent despot dedicated to the cause of his people's welfare. Despite being formidable in power and a mighty source of protection, he is also capable of personal virtues such as mercy, compassion, benevolence, truth, loyalty, wisdom and justice, all considered as divine attributes. In order to have his kingdom strongly established, the ruler needs to be totally free from wickedness and vices.

In **Tirukkural**, the king emerges as the supreme upholder of justice, wields his sceptre with personal virtues like love, sympathy, and kindness, and treats with benignity all his subjects. In order to ensure the continuum of his sceptre, he avoids vices like pride, anger, avarice, drinking, harlotry and gambling. It is interesting to note that gambling does not figure in the list of vices mentioned in the Jewish work. Unlike the Jewish Wisdom writer, Tiruvalluvar lays a special stress on the evil that befalls a gambler, who at the end, is bereft of his good manners, wealth and other virtues. While **Proverbs** stresses the basic need of justice for

the king, Tiruvalluvar finds it necessary to warn the king against all kinds of nepotism. This perhaps was occasioned by the fact that Solomon as a ruler was held in such a high esteem and enjoyed such a power that none in the administrative structure could hope to have his ears easily, whereas Tiruvalluvar found that the citizens in Tamil Nadu at his time seemed to have an easy access to the principal seat of power. Both the authors advise the rulers to be extremely wary of wicked counsellors in court. Significantly, though Solomon stops with advocating the cause of justice on the part of the king, Tiruvalluvar is so passionately committed to the cause of social justice that he says the ruler will turn into a murderer if he fails to uphold social justice, tempered with mercy directed towards the weak and the poor. Further, Solomon observes: "When the wicked rule, the people groan." (P 29:2). But Tiruvalluvar dwells at length on the misfortunes that befall a land whose ruler is not fair or just, by warning that there will be absolute chaos in the universe during the reign of such a ruler.

It is significant that the Wisdom writer accords Divine Right to the king, though he does not grant him infallibility. Tiruvalluvar, on the other hand, discerns certain attributes in any good ruler who reigns

upholding justice at all times, keeping the sacred yet unwritten dictates of **Dharmā** close to his heart. It is pertinent in this context to note that in the tradition of the Tamils, **Dharmā** is held in a much greater esteem than simple legal justice, as the former is invariably associated with profound underlying virtues such as compassion, charity and *'agape'*.

Tiruvalluvar sees in the king a model citizen of the land, who is sufficiently critical of himself in action at every stage:

> Faultless the king who first his own fault cures, and then
> Permits himself to scan faults of other men
> (T 436).

The king here is looked upon with a veneration akin to that shown to God because both play the roles essentially of protectors.

It is remarkable that both the writers compare the king's benignity to clouds that bring rain upon the land, anticipating nothing in return. The counsellors recommended by both the writers are men who are righteous, just, merciful, loyal, wise, diplomatic, persuasive and utterly free from self-interest, deceit and fear.

However, Tiruvalluvar's definition of a good counsellor includes minute details such as the need for circumspection, winsome rhetoric that is irresistible even in the ears of their adversaries, intrepid disposition, punctuality, ceaseless industry, high degree of integrity, purity of purpose in statecraft, equanimity of temper, a sound sense of anticipation and an extraordinary foresight. Strangely enough, Tiruvalluvar endorses the Machiavellian trait of dissembling before an enemy, with a view to dealing a fatal blow to him, at the most opportune moment.

It is interesting to note that both the Wisdom works caution the counsellors from getting too near the presence of the king. While Solomon counsels a prospective counsellor to avoid any trace of conceit before the eyes of the king, the Tamil sage, using a graphic image, warns a man in a similar situation to treat the royal presence as 'fire', avoid whispering and interchange of smiles with fellow courtiers, and restrain himself from showing any anxiety to learn of royal secrets. Further, the writer of **Proverbs** advises the counsellor simply to fear the king, while the Tamil sage specifically instructs the courtiers, not to despise any ruler on account of his youth or immaturity.

Thus, there is, by and large, plenty of common ground covered in respect of the conduct of kings, counsellors and courtiers in both the Wisdom works, despite the vast differences in their backgrounds. The insights, disseminated through these two great authors with regard to administration and diplomacy, bear an eloquent witness to their extraordinary political acumen as individuals as well as the high degree of sophistication attained in Statecraft, in both the ancient cultures.

CHAPTER SIX

FROM A FEMINIST FOCUS

The woman constitutes the 'centre' of life at home and hence forms the backbone of any human society. Nevertheless, she often proves to be a paradox extolled as an epitome of all virtues, on the one hand, and as a potential element of instability and destruction on the other, which, ultimately, gets exemplified in the downfall of the man in her life which may implicate, at times, even the fate of kingdoms in history. Nevertheless, by and large, human society has succeeded in perpetuating and institutionalizing the supremacy of the male of the species in all walks of life, social, political, economic and religious.

However, it is imperative that, in order to gain a proper perspective of the woman in society, the roles she plays in the social, familial and cultural spheres need to be considered at some length. A feminist perspective, therefore, is deliberately being employed in this chapter as a tool for analysis in order to assess the roles envisaged for woman in **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural**, mainly with a view to relating the entire discussion of the works in question, to societal values of their respective periods.

Feminism as a movement for the recognition of women's rights, has radical, political and sociological implications. Concept-wise, 'feminism' is both a doctrine and a practice based on the belief in the fundamental rights of women. To Sarah Delamount, the distinguishing characteristic of all feminists is simply "a desire that women be recognised as individuals in their own rights " (**The Sociology of Women: An Introduction** 41). Simone de Beauvoir, the French feminist, goes to the extent of arguing how 'womanhood' is often the result of some kind of psychic conditioning. "One is not born but rather one becomes a woman." (295). Interestingly, such a statement also implies that the so-called 'feminine' and 'masculine' are mere social constructs, when viewed in respect of behaviour and social norms.

The patriarchal tradition presupposes that women believe in the tradition and style of behaviour, already assigned to them, as 'natural', ordained in the integrated, universal scheme of things, and those who refuse to conform to them, tend to emerge as rather 'unfeminine' or 'un-womanlike' in the literal sense of the term. Thus, it is patriarchy that has been eminently responsible for women's secondary position in society.

Oxford English Dictionary defines feminism from a political angle: "the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of sexes " (Joyce M Hawkins ed 518). **Grolier's Encyclopaedia of Knowledge** also underlines women's quest for equality with men only in terms of economic and socio-political spheres:

> Feminism is the advocacy of women's rights to full citizenship - that is political, economic and social equality with men (235).

According to Sharon Spencer, 'feminism' implicitly suggests that

> traditional definition of women are inadequate and that women suffer injustice because of their sex (**American Writing Today** Vol.12 157).

Perhaps, in an ideal situation, men and women are mutually dependent, as the statement of Bruham Carrie bears out:

> Fathers should be patriarchal sovereigns and mothers, the queens of their households and the dependence is mutual. (93).

Nevertheless, in the world of reality, men tend to assert their exclusive right to inviolable sovereignty over women in most societies today.

That the ancient world held women in general in contempt has been a well-established fact. According to J.R.W.Stott,

> Plato, who went to the extent of believing that the soul is both imprisoned in the body and released only to be incarnated, went on to suggest that a bad man's fate would be reincarnation as a woman (**Issues Facing Christians Today** 235).

Interestingly, Plato's disciple Aristotle looked upon the female as "a kind of mutilated male" (**The Generation of Animals**, 175).

William Barclay, the well-known theologist, makes a specific reference to an instance of the low status assigned to women in the **Talmud**:

> In the Jewish form of morning prayer, a Jewish man, every morning gave thanks that God had not made him a Gentile, a slave, or a woman (235).

Moreover, the Jewish law held that woman was not a person but a chattel or thing meant for ownership in the hands of man. She was her husband's absolute possession and the latter could deal with her just in any manner he willed.

Commenting on the plight of women, in general, Graves, a contemporary sociologist makes the following, caustic comment:

> She is yet too often found either the petted capricious plaything or a toiling care-worn slave and thus she lives and dies fulfilling her responsibilities as the helpmate of her brotherman - a being intended to be a co-worker in promoting the spiritual and intellectual advancement of the race (**American Female Society**, XVI).

Often, such a biased treatment of woman stems from the tacit patriarchal belief in the supposed inferiority on the part of the former:

> The Euro-American feminist theories treat patriarchy as an isolable system responsible for the sub-ordination of women (**Women Writing in India 600 B.C to the Present**, Vol. I, 41).

On the other hand, Shulemith Furstone, a sociologist, highlights another fact that tends to subjugate women in the hands of men, namely,

> the biological predicament of women's child-bearing is the reason for her economic subjugation. (**The Dialectic of Sex**, 30).

Viewing from a purely sociological perspective, Magnus Horschfield sees Feminism as:

> an expression of resentment at the unjust treatment meted out to women. It voices the new woman's objection to be treated as a doormat or a piece of furniture meant for the convenience of man, and rebels against the hostile environment in which a woman is forced to live. (**Woman, East and West** 135).

Frederick Engel posits women's inferior social position vis-a vis that of men, attributing a basically materialistic motive to the entire issue. Still more recently, feminists like Matilda Joslyn Gage, have managed to carry the battle further into the theological territory and assert that it is wrong to use only the masculine form for 'God'.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that, to Lanci, an anthropologist,

> The Hebrew word 'El Shaddai, the Almighty' when translated even today suggests something distinctively feminine (45).

Feminists accord a great emphasis to the true meaning of the compound word 'freeman', which implies a free human being, regardless of gender -- 'a free man'

or 'a free woman'. They often project the system of marriage as one of the factors leading to the female subjection at the hands of the male. According to Joyce Gillo, there are three types of feminists -- the Reformist, the Radical and the Socialist. While the Reformist feminists seek equality through freedom, radical feminists perceive society as rooted in inequality based on patriarchy and the only solution to the problem, according to them, is transforming the existing social condition through a process of creating awareness. Socialist feminists, rooted more firmly in Marxist theory, wish to develop a strategy in order to jointly attack male domination and sociological injustice, thereby restructuring the very basis of the currently obtained male-female relationship. 'The radical feminists', according to Vicky Randall,

> see that both the family and state are seen to embody systematic male power and domination. Alliances with men are not possible .... Women must form separatist groups, shun relations with men and seek an end to male domination .... Their major points of attack are marriage, family control, reproduction and violence against women. (44).

Ultimately, what women care for most, is an understanding presence which men hitherto are extremely

hesitant to accord to them. Woman, thus, often remains 'invisible' because of man's own blindness, and inability to see her as she really is. Further, the central issues of feminism arrange themselves around a view that Literature is essentially sexist in the portrayal of woman, and often, the text reveals injustices of a male society in which women are implicitly assigned to an 'inferior' status.

It is quite obvious that several of the views of both the Jewish Wisdom writer and Tiruvalluvar fall much short of the expectations of modern feminists, as they have been much circumscribed by the socio-cultural conditions obtained in the ages in which these two works were conceived.

The family pattern of the Israelites was predominantly patriarchal and centred entirely around the tribe or clan to which an individual belonged. In their turn, the tribes traced their relationship back to their own respective ancient forefathers, strictly along patriarchal lines. Within the tribes, the individuals chose to identify themselves only by their father's houses as exemplified by the following catalogue of familial inheritance:

> Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah

> begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron and Hezron begot Ram, Ram begot Amminadab. Amminadab begot Nahshon and Nashhon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah (Mathew 1:2-7).

Incidentally, it may be noted that only the names of significant women like Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba who had been Uriah's wife are recalled here.

The authority vested on the title "father", among the Jews, was enormous. The husband in any household was considered virtually the ruler, enjoying complete dominion over his wife and children. Indeed "to marry a wife is expressed by the verb *ba'al*, the root meaning of which is 'to become a master'" (**Roland de Vaux** 26).

Interestingly enough, the Israelites also practised "a form of marriage by purchase" (26). For instance, "mohar" was a sum of money which the fiance was bound to pay to the girl's father (**Genesis** 34:2 and **Exodus** 22:16), commensurate with the social standing of the family (I **Samuel** 18:23). The new bride was supposed to leave her parents, in order to live with her

husband and join his clan, to which her children would absolutely belong. For instance, Abraham would not allow Isaac to go to Mesopotamia, if the bride chosen for him would not come to Canaan (**Genesis** 24:5-8). As a critic points out,

> It was the custom to take a wife from among one's own kith and kin. The custom was a relic of tribal life (**Ancient Israel** 30).

Further, the wife addressed her husband as 'Lord' (**Genesis** 18:12), even as a slave or subject would, his master or king. The woman also did not enjoy any right of inheritance to ancestral property, as Roland de Vaux rightly observes:

> The wife does not inherit from her husband nor daughters from their fathers except when there is no male heir. (39).

However, despite all such obvious social disadvantages, the wife of an Israelite was by no means treated totally on par with a slave. For instance, a man enjoyed the right to sell his slaves or even daughters (**Exodus** 21:17), but could never sell his wife even when he happened to acquire her as a mere captive in war (**Deuteronomy** 21:14). Within the confines of a family too, the status of a wife was considerably

enhanced on the birth of her first child especially if it happened to be a male.

All the manual labour within the domestic limits rested on the shoulders of the wife. Normally, the woman managed the household so well as to continually increase its total wealth. Elizabeth Roberts highlights the role the woman played in running the routine in an ancient household:

> Fundamentally whatever else a woman might do in her life, the ultimate responsibility for the daily care of the home and the family lay with her and not with the male members of the household. (**A Woman's Place** 23).

As found in **Proverbs**, it was the woman again who tended the flock and crops in the fields, cooked the food and spun the yarn (P31: 13-16). However, it should be stressed here that all such apparent drudgery, far from lowering the standing of the woman among her peers, considerably enhanced her domestic status. In fact, as pointed out in **Proverbs** 31:29, this industrious woman is greatly admired, praised and loved by both her husband and children. **The Old Testament** simply ordains the man to earn by "the sweat of his brow" (**Genesis** 3:19), and the woman to keep hearth and "beget children' (**Genesis** 3:16). It enabled the man to take charge of all the

work in the field outside, while confining the woman to her limited, well-defined place at home, and this may be viewed either as a means of relegating her to a position of subservience or as a pragmatic approach towards division of labour.

With regard to the social background of women in ancient Tamil Nadu, here too the woman had been looked upon either as a boon or a bane. On the one hand, the woman was the sacred deity, adored and worshipped and on the other hand, she was a profane object of lust and a potential instrument for evil from whom the men would do well to seek escape some time or other, as implied in the ancient concepts of (i.e.) ***grahasta*** (household phase) and ***Vanaprasta*** (Ascetic phase). All the same, the society was quick to honour and celebrate the woman's potential for motherhood, so long as she chose to remain assiduously subservient to its dictates. As Carle C. Zimmerman remarks,

> The ancient Indian documents such as the **Mahabharata**, the **Ramayana** and the **Vedas** give women a very high and protected place in their basic moral codes. Husband and wife stand as equals before God (**Family and Civilization in the East and the West** 86).

In a Vedic hymn, a husband addresses his wife in the following manner:

> A friend, thou shalt be, a friend thou hast become,
>
> May our friendship be everlasting
>
> (K.R.Bhashyam 9).

The institution of monogamy in the society of **Rig Veda** constitutes in itself an eloquent recognition of the high social status of women. Sarojini Naidu rightly traces the roots of the progress of Indian women to the recognition they enjoyed during the Vedic times:

> In those beautiful days of Vedic period of India, the glory of which still surrounds the country like a faint halo, women took part freely in the social and political life of the country .... It is with such a heritage as the foundation that the present women's movement in India has evolved. (**Women in Modern India** 4).

Nevertheless, such a glorious Vedic period was followed by a phase of technological transformation. Anthropologists assert that historically, it is the growth of surplus wealth and private property, and the consequent anxiety to protect one's inheritance and lives in the patriarchal family system, that eventually paved the way for increased restrictions imposed on

women, ultimately resulting in numerous wars. Consequently, women came to be treated not only as a protected lot, but as jealously guarded possessions in the hands of their respective male partners, thereby assuming, in symbolic terms, the status of an item of valuable property.

Further, it was Manu, the first codifier of the Hindu law, who made an explicit provision around 200 B C., for the legal dependence of woman on man. During the medieval period, with the exception of a few eminent women making their mark in different walks of life, most women resigned themselves to a low-profile life:

> There was a steady deterioration in their position and status in society. Denial of education to the girls brought out far-reaching effects on the status of women and, consequently, on the role of women in society. (**Changing Status and Adjustment of Women** 40).

Over the centuries, the woman was increasingly made to suppose that she would attain her supreme salvation in a home, purely in terms of the quality of her relationship with her husband and children. Social and intellectual strivings were not at all expected of her. She was considered as potentially vulnerable and

hence, meant to be guarded against danger. This was indeed another subtle pretext to keep women personally dependent on their men.

It is interesting to note that woman enjoyed a temporary phase of ascendancy during the Buddha's time, i.e. around the 6th century B C. According to Indira Kulshreshta,

> When India witnessed the advent of Buddhism, there was a welcome change in the position of women in society, for it allowed women to be educated, to travel as missionaries and even to remain unmarried (5).

However, with the advent of the alien Moghul rule in India, the status of Indian women nose-dived and reached the very nadir. As K.M.Panicker remarks,

> The rigorous seclusion of women became the rule as a result of both of the imitation of the system of purdah which the Muslims enforced, and a sense of fear arising from the lack of general security (**Women of India** 9).

The demands made on the wife in contemporary Indian society, are numerous. She functions as a mother, nurse, cook, teacher for the children and an efficient accountant for the household, and also

undertakes all other onerous tasks that demand total commitment and self-effacing love on her part. Nevertheless, she is still, by and large, visualized only as a necessary beast of burden that suffers silently, bearing nothing but implicit obedience to her earthly master.

As Mary Jacobus observes,

> The fate of woman is different in different countries but in all they are more or less treated as slaves. (**Women Writing and Writing about Women** 113).

It is even said that in modern life, education and jobs have tended to masculinize women, leading ultimately to the loss of their former, feminine charm. In the words of chauvinistic analysts like Farnham,

> Careers and higher education were leading to the masculinization of women and enormously dangerous consequences to the home. (**Feminine Mystique** 37).

Apart from sheer economic compulsions in the modern age, the archetypal image of woman, in what Jung calls "collective unconscious", continues to modulate and qualify the actual outlook of the society at large on woman. To Enrich Frimm,

> Woman appears as the eternal-dualities -- Mother and Bitch, Lover, Temptress and Witch .... She was the goddess of Life as well as Death (**The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness** 157).

According to Rose Mary Agonito, in St. Augustine's account again,

> Woman emerges in the threefold role of Temptress, Wife and Mother, all of which emphasize her instrumental status in human society (**History of Ideas on Woman:** A Source Book 74).

The projections of woman as the avenging spirit, devouring mother, temptress, devout wife and sacrificial goat are all embodied in the literature of the Greeks through different symbolic figures - Eumenides (Aeschylus), Jocusta (Euripides), Siren (Homer), Penelope (Homer) and Iphigenia (Aeschylus).

In sharp contrast, the role of woman as wife in Indian society was highly eulogized and immortalized in the epics and *puranas* of Indians. R.K.Narayan pointedly observes how,

> India owed its spiritual eminence to the fact that the people here realized that a woman's

> primary duty and divine privilege was being a wife, for the dominant quality of the epic heroines is a blind, stubborn following of their husbands, like the shadow following the substance (**The Dark Room** 141).

The complimentary roles that the husband and wife play are very vital for the ultimate harmony and peace in any family, especially where it concerns the healthy development of children. Interestingly, W.O.E. Oesterley, a critic of repute, underlines the patriarchal scheme of values embedded in **Proverbs** in the following manner:

> Woman is thought of and spoken of almost wholly from the point of view of man. Marriage is for man's benefit, not the woman's. She is useful to him to look after the household, minister to his comfort, bear children, all for the man. She can be divorced but she cannot divorce her husband; he can have a couple of wives or more and concubines if he can afford to keep them all; she may only have one husband (IXXX).

Verses in **Proverbs** such as the following take on an implicitly chauvinistic tone about them, as the point

of their perception happens to be a pronouncedly masculine one: "whoso findeth a wife, findeth a good thing and obtaineth a favour of the Lord" (P18:12).

In the words of C.H.Toy, such a man

> .... findeth not only a good thing but a good fortune which he must regard as a special favour from God who bestows all good fortune (ICC 365).

Further, C. Bridges sees "The prudent wife" (P19:14) as honoured as a special blessing to be obtained by our prayers at the hand of the giver (278), as 'prudence' implies not only her wise governing of her household but "that godly consideration connected with divine wisdom by which she becomes the joy and confidence of her husband" (278).

Again in an interesting Jewish collection of acrostic poems, under an Alphabetic Code or Golden ABC of the perfect wife in **Proverbs** chapter 31, the ideal wife is described as

> industrious, sagacious, capable of doing business, manager of the house, a kind-hearted mistress, the trusted friend of husband and children, honoured in her own person of what

> she does, a picture not romantic but also not Philistine (**C.H.Toy** 542).

An incisive look at the above instance may suggest traits or virtues associated with a modern, twentieth century liberated woman as well, although Derek Kidner is of the view that

> The traditional beauty of Jewish home life is both explained and illustrated in (P31: 10-31) for we may well believe that the picture presented reflects what was a reality in many a Jewish home (**Tyndale's Old Testament Commentaries: Proverbs** 190).

From the verses in **Proverbs** we may safely infer that the woman in Jewish society provided maintenance of her household from all quarters (P31:14); ensured the preparation of cloths and garments in wool and flax (P31:13), and was adept in the culture of vine (P24:30). As Prof C.H.Toy points out, the woman was skilful in

> dying garments with purple colour matter obtained from Mediterranean shell fish, an important Phoenician industry of women, as such garments worn by the housewife indicated their wealth or high rank (543).

For his part, the husband took no part in the domestic administration, being totally occupied with

public affairs as suggested in **Proverbs** 31:23. "Her husband is known in the gates When he sits among the elders of the land" (P31:23).

Significantly, a husband derived civil benefit from his wife's reputation and it was assumed that the head of the so well-ordered household, as vividly portrayed in **Proverbs** 31:23, must be a worthy man. However, an average man was concerned with getting the right kind of wife, and was not content with getting just any woman.

Further, chastity is one of the most prized virtues in the eyes of the author of **Proverbs**. For the uninterrupted continuance of family life, the virtuous woman should "retain her honour as strong men retain riches " (P11:16). Dake interprets the term *'Chayil'* or 'Virtuous' as 'strength of mind' (649). Such a woman of moral strength is cherished as "a crown to her husband " (P12:4). In contrast, the weakling contracts and communicates diseases which bring rottenness to the bones. A fair woman who lacks modesty is compared to "a golden ring in a swine's snout." (P11:12).

In Asiatic countries, a nose jewel is very common (**Genesis** 24:47). A jewel on the swine's snout is as unbecoming as a beautiful woman that is destitute of

good breeding and modest courage, who has lost all moral sense and purity (**Dake** 648).

King Solomon enjoins man to practise monogamy, although polygamy was quite prevalent at his time. He exhorts the youth "to rejoice with his own wife" (P5:8). In the words of Bridges,

> Cherish her with gentleness and purity as the loving hind and pleasant roe which were objects of special delight and endearment, a picture of the lively delight which the wife naturally engages (**An Exposition of Proverbs** 65).

Also, significantly,

> the relationship of Yahweh and Israel was often compared to that of a man and wife (**The New Bible Dictionary** 1259).

In the light of the above discussion, we may safely affirm that the Jewish sages attached great value to marriage as an exalted, social institution. There is practically "no mention of divorce either for the incompatibility of temper or for adultery" (W.O.E.Oesterley in **Proverbs** IXXX).

Beyond any shade of doubt, the woman in every household in Israel was expected to play a pivotal role as indicated by the following verses:

Every wise woman buildeth her house (P14:1);

and The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her (P.31:12).

As for the possibility of a power struggle in any family, Bridges goes on to say:

> If it implies subjection, it involves no degradation. Indeed, no greater glory could be desired than that which is given to it that it should illustrate the great mystery -- Christ and the Church (528).

In **Tirukkural** also, *'illal'* (housewife) or the *mistress* of the household' is endowed with the domestic virtues of frugality, thrift and industry. In the words of Rev. Ellis, the term *illal* signifies "she to whose safeguard, domestic happiness is entrusted" (196).

According to H.A.Popley, "Tiruvalluvar regards family life as noble as the life of the ascetic" (**The Sacred Kural** 17), and hence the choice of the wife assumes a crucial significance in any man's life. Commenting on this thematic trait, Dr. Xavier S. Thaninayagam says,

> The very purpose of married life is to provide the companionship and joint partnership which promotes altruistic love and entertainment (**Tiruvalluvar** 87).

In the view of the Tamil sage, it is the responsibility of the woman to serve her husband as "his helpmate" (T.51), "possessing household excellence" (T.52). In Sangam tradition, as V.Sp.Manickam puts it,

> The society depended upon the consciousness of women, of their responsibility for its stability and existence. (**The Tamil Concept of Love** 37).

Like the Jewish writer, Tiruvalluvar also accords a tremendous value to chastity: "Nothing is more excellent than a wife if she possesses the stability of chastity" (T53). To Tiruvalluvar, as to the other classical writers,

> **Karpu** (chastity) is power invincible, power dynamic. It sets the environment, the world going right in its path and if, by chance, the environment or the world goes wrong, it annihilates the world. (K.Appadurai 66).

Even as in the Jewish sociological structure, the woman in **Tirukkural** is assigned the position of a caretaker of her husband and household name, through the preservation of her chastity. Significantly, to Tiruvalluvar, chastity is not merely a virture pertaining to the physique but is an entity concerning

the mind: "Of what avails is watch and ward, Honour is a woman's safest guard" (T 59).

Chastity for a woman also means implicit obedience to her husband. Such an obedient wife earns for herself the name of *pativratā* and only she possesses "the rocky strength of a moral purpose " (Balasubramanian, 22).

In fact, Tamil epics and *puranas* abound in examples of wifely devotion. In **Silappatikāram**, dated 5th century A.D., Kannagi is extolled as the very embodiment of the ideal of chastity. To Ilankovatikaḷ, the sage-author of **Silappatikāram**,

> Chastity is an absolute virtue for women, and Kannagi is the only Goddess on earth possessing the mighty virtue. (**Silappatikāram** "Adaikalakathai", Lines 142-144).

The Kannagi cult is celebrated even today through elaborate rites and rituals in certain parts of Tamil Nadu. Sita, the central protagonist of Kambar's epic **Ramāyanā**, according to Uma Chakravarthi, is

> the archetype of Indian womanhood with her self-effacing qualities -- loyalty, obedience and chastity .... the quintessence of wifely devotion (70).

Several such women characters figuring in Indian epics and *puranas* are considered as prototypes of loyalty and chastity. As A.W.Oak points out,

> Sita, Ahalya, Draupadi, Gandhari, Mandodari, Damayanti .... were held as lofty examples of womanhood for their loyalty to their husbands, their steadfastness and chastity. (26).

Nevertheless, it may be pertinent to bear in mind that in defining the virtues of his ideal woman, Tiruvalluvar merely affirms the popular view of the ancient Tamil epics and cultural legends:

> No God adoring, low she bends before her Lord,
> Then rising serves, the rain falls instant at her words. (T 55).

Despite all the nobility and charm assigned to the woman of virtue in the above verse, there is also an implicit assertion of the superiority of the male over the female in the sociological scale.

K.M.Balasubramanian, a contemporary critic, offers the ingenious comment that 'God' in the above verse does not refer to the supreme God but only to **'kāman'**, a relatively petty deity, the prototype of Cupid in the Tamil pantheon (**Tirukkural of Tiruvalluvar** 295). However, Balasubramaniam's comment is not tenable here,

as such an interpretation of the verse will grossly reduce the importance that Tiruvalluvar attaches to chastity, and warp and limit the richness and scope of the meaning, conventionally assigned to the verse.

Further, in the chapter entitled "Felicity to Domestic life", only a subordinate position is assigned to the woman, but the householder is pictured as entitled to all reverence, regardless of his own status.

> If wife be wholly true to him who gained her as his bride,
> Great glory gains she in the world where gods bliss abide (T59).

In another verse, Tiruvalluvar goes to the extent of asserting that only a subservient woman deserves to be "blessed with great glory in the world where Gods in bliss abide" (T 58). It is also significant that though Tiruvalluvar does not particularly stress chastity for man as he does for woman, in one remarkable instance, he asserts that greatness will accrue to a man, only if he guards himself like a single-hearted woman. (T 974)

> Manly excellence, that looks not on another's wife,
> Is not virtue merely, 'tis full propriety (T 148).

Further, any man who covets another's wife is described as 'a great fool' and is 'numbered with the dead while he lives' (T 143). Such a man "will acquire guilt that will abide with him imperishably for ever" (T 145), and from him will depart nevermore "hatred, sin, fear, foul disgrace, these four" (T 146). Thus, both the works do enjoin chastity for man, and condemn adultery with one voice.

The role of the woman defined in **Proverbs** will not be complete without a reference to the consequences that befall a non-compliant individual. Further, the pronouncement of such warnings is made primarily from an extremely andro-centric point of view, as exemplified by the following verse: "The contentions of a wife are a continual dropping" (P19:13).

The Israelite sage does not dwell much on the contentious man though he says "It is an honour for man to keep aloof from strife" (P20:3). He dwells at length on the undesirability of the brawling female who is compared to a perpetual cloudburst that is overwhelming, and the whirlwind that cannot be contained at any cost. It is thought wiser for a man "to retire to the attic" than to be "worried by a quarrelsome wife" (P21:9). In the words of Dake, such a woman is described as follows:

> She cannot sit, stand, work or sleep without
> her continual and perpetual nagging (655).

The image of the disagreeable woman looms large in the world of **Proverbs**, which readily subscribes to the lower status assigned to the woman in the family. In contrast, it must be pointed out that Tiruvalluvar does not dwell at length on the unpleasant aspects of the nagging or hysterical woman, though he underscores domestic harmony as being free from such:

> Domestic life with those who don't agree
> Is dwelling in a shed with snake for company
> (T 890).

While **Proverbs** stresses the role of woman in "building up one's house" (P12:1), Tiruvalluvar interprets the efforts of raising one's family as a "manly act and knowledge full" as "untiring perseverance in both effort and wise contrivance to raise one's family" (Drew, T 1022).

> A man's true manliness consists in making
> himself the head and benefactor of the family
> (T1 1026).
>
> The fearless hero bears the brunt amid the
> warrier throng
> Amid his kindred so the burden rests upon the
> strong (T 1027).

I'll make my race renowned, if man shall say,
With vest succinct the Goddess leads the way
(T 1023).

The above **kurals** make it abundantly clear that man is the natural head of the house, with the onus of serving its cause selflessly. Both the writers are, more or less, of the same mind on this subject.

It is interesting to note that Tiruvalluvar warns man "not to give his soul to the love of wife" (T902); "quaking before his wife" (T905), and "submitting to her" (T903); for, "being obedient to woman's law as such, a meek submission will clothe him with everlasting shame" (T902), and "no virtuous deed, no seemly wealth, no pleasure rests with him" (T909). He is of the opinion that "foolishness which results from devotion to one's wife will never be found in those who possess a reflecting mind " (T 910).

In the light of the above **kurals**, it may be safely surmised that there must have been at least some bones of contention at the micro-level man-woman relationship, occurring in several households even during the days of the **Kural**. Also, there must have been some kind of tacit struggle for power going on between several householders and their spouses, despite all the veneer of male superiority shown off in public.

A contemporary critic, Ramakrishnan, has recently averred that Tiruvalluvar has not spoken about the rights of women in any of his couplets (**Dinamalar: Nagar Malar**, Daily, Nellai 3rd Oct'92, 7). Though very little can be said in defence of Tiruvalluvar's chauvinism, one should also bear in mind that the Tamil sage also was influenced by the views prevalent in his times, and consequently developed his own peculiar weak spots.

M.Annamalai seeks to justify Tiruvalluvar's opinion of women vis-a-vis men, in the light of sociological conditions prevalent in his age:

> In the male dominating society, in which a man alone has the sole responsibility of eking out the livelihood, caring for the family and moving with different kinds of individuals, all for the betterment of his family and society, if Tiruvalluvar thinks man is to be esteemed more than woman, there seems to be nothing wrong in it (**Vaḷḷuvar Tanitanmai** 43).

Interestingly enough, there are instances in the **kural** which at least implicitly highlight certain situations in life in which men sought approbation of their own behaviour, strictly from the feminine point of view. Their condition can be deduced from certain

imagery pertaining to women, used primarily as simile or metaphor:

> When master from field aloof hath stood,
> The land will sulk like wife in angry mood
> (T 1103).

The average man felt morally indicted by the disapproval of his woman when he was caught in the habit of indolence. The fact that a woman's frown or angry disposition could elicit a better behaviour from her man, can also been seen in the following **kural**:

> The earth, that kindly dame, will laugh to see
> Men seated idle pleading poverty (T 1040).

While the Jewish Wisdom writer does not deal with the fact of a man being mocked at, admonished or guided by any woman, Tiruvalluvar condemns outright a man's excessive vulnerability and susceptibility before the charms and allurements of women, including his wife.

As regards the position of motherhood, **Proverbs** pays a high tribute to mothers. In the Hebrew text, we see that the mother is to be honoured (**Exodus** 20:12) and feared (**Leviticus** 19:3). As Elizabeth B.Hurlock puts it

> The authority and prestige of the mother in the eyes of the world are not so great as they once thought .... As their attitudes change

> with changes in their concept of the mother's role, they become less respectful and loving and more critical -- a condition that has a strong impact on mother-child relationship (**Child Development** 510).

In terms of the time spent in the company of the child, the mother has greater opportunities than the father to influence her offspring's psychological growth and behaviour. Further, tradition also favours the mother's influence, since "child-rearing in our culture is generally recognized primarily as the mother's privilege and responsibility" (George G.Thompson 630).

As pointed out by Ross D Parke, mothers seem to be more important than fathers in shaping the social behaviour and the moral development of children,

> because mothers seek information about their children's feelings and their interpretation of their transgressions before punishing their children whereas fathers favour immediate punishment without discussion .... In addition to offering more verbal cognitive structuring of moral contingencies in the situation, she may offer a more positive social model of sensitivities and concerns with the perceptions and feelings of others (477).

Also, there are experimental evidences to show that

> the sight, sound, touch and warmth offered by the mother not only have social and emotional significance for the development of the child but also have repercussions on the development of nerve centres in the brain, as the most important stimuli come from the mother (S.Dutta Ray 2).

Even the ancient Hebrew society of **Proverbs** did recognize the positive role played by women in the domestic context:

> While the woman was deemed a piece of property, practically she was valued in her home and the community for the sake of her personal worth (R.B.Y.Scott, 197).

In the **Proverbs**, king Solomon is in agreement with the Jewish law that condemned the faults of the children against their mother, and commanded equal honour to be given to father and mother:

> whoso robbeth his father or his mother and saith it is no transgression, the same is the companion of a destroyer (P28:44).

It is significant that Tiruvalluvar does not have anything to say, as regards this aspect of children ill-treating their own parents.

The mother is indispensable to children and home. Her strength lies essentially in her innate capacity for compassion, intimate closeness and sacrifice:

> A mother is a Guru and an unremitting pillar of security .... capable and withstanding the rust of time .... soft yet firm like petals of a flower which protect the bud .... when fortune and friends turn against, one person always by the side, giving warmth and solace enabling to endure the long chilly winters of adversity ("My mother", **The Hindu - Young World** 18th September'93 4).

In **Proverbs**, there are various references to family life from which one sees that the mother occupies a position as important as the father does in the domestic sphere. There are certain areas where identical treatment is given to men and women, especially in the context of children: "A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." (P10:1).

Tiruvalluvar also points out how wise children are a source of joy not only to their own parents but also to the entire community:

Their children's wisdom, greater than their own confessed,
Through the wide world is sweet to every human heart (T 88).

In **Proverbs**, the woman is held wholly responsible for domestic happiness, and the virtuous woman is praised by her husband, children and society:

Her children arise up and call her blessed:
her husband also and he praiseth her.
Many daughters have done virtuously,
but thou excellest them all
(P31:28,29).

In **Tirukkural** also, the virtuous woman is highly praised. She is referred to as "the choice treasure doth the world contain" (T54). While the father is responsible for the education of the children, the mother is basically responsible for producing children of good disposition and blameless nature.

N.Subramanian and R.Rajalakshmi are of the following view:

> To Valluvar, woman is a traditional subordinate, charming, enjoyable, begetter of children, an ideal follower who is not to presume to lead man; she is to treat her husband as the only God (IXXIV).

It is true that there is ample room for such an argument, deduced on the basis of selective **kurals** that Tiruvalluvar wants women to idolize the men in their lives. However, such a gross deduction cannot be tenable in the light of some other **kurals** which capture man's helplessness, susceptibility and craving for approval when contrasted with situations that highlight women's superior grace, compassion and sensual charm. So the higher political position that Tiruvalluvar assigns to men over the women should not be made much of, beyond reasonable limits.

Many areas of **Proverbs**, especially chapters 1-9, are devoted to warning the youth against illicit sexual experience. After the manner of wisdom literature which insisted that instruction is primarily meant for man, and hence he is instructed to guard himself from the seductive charms and viles of any strange woman. John Garlock comments,

> He who yields to her seduction is as hopelessly naive as these simple-minded creatures -- ox, fool-bird, (P7:22,23) no matter how strong (894).

In the Israel of the past, as elsewhere in the ancient East, adultery was considered not only a sin against one's neighbour but also against God:

> For by means of a whorish woman, a man is brought to a piece of bread; and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life (P6:26).

Tiruvalluvar considers adultery as a crime; and concubinage as folly and waste of money. Unlike the Jewish Wisdom writer, Tiruvalluvar does not portray man as the gullible victim and woman as the active seductress, who makes man fall from the path of virtue. He simply instructs man to protect himself from the materialistic pursuit of prostitutes and from adultery. Though prostitution was accepted as a way of life, Tiruvalluvar condemns it as a bad personal habit. His counsels are not merely utilitarian but also reflective of his idealistic preference for marital fidelity.

The place of woman in society is an absorbing subject of interest. Various economic, social and personal factors determine a woman's position in society, and it has taken a long and difficult struggle to bring about some changes in her condition.

In **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** the ideal of family life is highly extolled. Monogamy is idealized as the desirable norm: Parents are viewed as responsible guides of their children, entitled to obedience and respect.

The woman is clearly reckoned as a source of power, inspiration and charm in the house, capable of rendering a home mirthful or miserable. In both the cultures, chaste women who show moral strength are exalted. Man is deemed the head of the house but invested also with the onus of raising and sustaining the entire family. Chastity is enjoined for man also and adultery is unequivocally condemned. There is no mention of divorce or polygamy in both the works which shows the authors' high esteem for marital fidelity and conjugal love on the one hand and the high degree of stability enjoyed by families in those days, on the other.

In **Proverbs**, the virtuous wife is described as a gift from God and by whom man obtains favours from God. She builds her house, which metaphorically also implies laying the foundation for domestic prosperity. She is industrious, sagacious, charitable and functions as a business manager and provider of maintenance of her household, manifesting most of the salient traits of modern, liberated women.

In **Tirukkural** also, the ideal woman is thrifty and capable of tackling the expenditure within the means of her husband and possesses the merit of taking care of her husband, children and herself.

The verses in **Proverbs** give us a unique glimpse into the intimacy of familial bonds. One finds an accurate portrait of the same in the description of an Iaraelite couple:

> An Israelite wife was loved and listened to by her husband and treated by him as equal. It was a faithful reflection of the teaching enshrined in (**Genesis** 2:18,24), where God created woman as a helpmate for man to whom she was to cling (39).

However, it must be pointed out that the Israelite sage does not deal with the aspect of contention in man in elaborate terms, as he does for a brawling nagging woman, a fact that points to the definite possibilities of the prevalent chauvinistic trends in the ancient Jewish society.

Tiruvalluvar also talks of the plight of a man living with a nagging and contentious wife. Though the wife played only a subservient role in the society of the times of **Tirukkural**, there are instances where she was hailed as the mistress of the household bringing forth children, who are the ornaments of the family. Tiruvalluvar's ideal woman is chaste, hospitable, charitable and frugal. She lends such a valuable

support to her husband that he bears himself honourably, with a lion-like gait in the midst of enemies. She elicits divine energy through her humility and utter devotion to her husband. She is regarded as a choice treasure and a veritable boon to her husband and the society at large.

It is interesting to read Tiruvalluvar's condemnation of men in the context of their susceptibility to the charms or power of women, even within the bond of marriage. Perhaps, it might have been the result of a subtle sociological power struggle that was being carried on in the society of the day. He deliberately relegates woman to a subservient position in the household as well as the society at large. On the other hand, he extols the man who works with devotion to raise the family, saying that his true manliness lies in bearing the burden of the family and in his capacity to face challenges as the head of the household.

Regarding the status of woman in the ancient world, be it Israel or India, the woman was deprived of her fundamental rights and privileges by man except in the domestic sphere of life. It must be conceded that socially, woman occupied a lower rank in the domestic

sphere. However, there are unassailable instances in Tiruvalluvar which bear eloquent testimony to men's susceptibility and sensitivity to the opinions of righteous women even when the women happen to belong to ordinary households. It was a fact of life that an average householder could find happiness and harmony in life only when his ways of social behaviour could enlist the total approval of the woman in his life. It shows that even in the ancient World, women did make substantial contribution to the moral behaviour of their so-called superior male partners.

Thus the works of the Jewish wisdom writer and the Tamil sage Tiruvalluvar reveal certain common thematic concerns, irrespective of their linguistic and cultural differences. The similarities in the ethos and values governing the moral behaviour of men and women in respect of the ancient Jewish and Tamil societies are truly amazing. The above analysis throws light also on the domain of certain feelings that define the relationship between man and woman in finer terms.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SALIENT LITERARY FEATURES IN PROVERBS AND TIRUKKURAL

Proverbs and **Tirukkural**, being monumental studies in social ethics, are comparable in "the overall intent, emphasis and execution" (Henry H.H. Remak 13), though separated in respect of time and space. These two works have enjoyed popular acclaim down the centuries, not only because of their contents but also the manner in which they have been designed. As in all literary masterpieces, substance and style are inseparable in the case of these two literary artifacts too, and hence, a close analysis of the organization and structure of these works is being undertaken here.

Even a casual glance at these works will convince any reader that considerable effort has gone into the organization in the case of both the works compared. The appeal of any literary work gets considerably enhanced when there is a happy marriage of content and structure: theme and craftsmanship. Rene Wellek is quite justified in highlighting this fact:

> Every work of art imposes an order, an organization, a unity on its materials. This unity sometimes seems very loose, as in many sketches or adventure stories but it increases

> to the complex close-knit organization of certain poems in which it may be almost impossible to change a word or the position of a word without impairing its total effect (**Theory of Literature** 24).

The twin ends of poetry, according to several perceptive critics like Philip Sidney, are "to teach and delight " (**An Apologie for Poetry** 10). Solomon and Tiruvalluvar are both literary geniuses of a high order, who are extremely mindful of serving the twin ends of pleasure and utility. Each of these works can be compared with the other for they feature most of the parameters of comparative literature recommended by H.H.Remak such as "elective affinities, ... theme, problem, genre, style, simultaneousness, *zeitgeist*, stage, cultural evolution, etc." (**Comparative Methods and Perspectives** 23).

The primary means by which both the writers reflect the quality of human experience is through employment of concrete and vivid imagery, perhaps because both of them, in the words of Richard Niebuhr, are aware, "Man is a being who grasps and shapes reality with the aid of great images, metaphors and analogies". (**The Responsible Self** 161).

Further, the 'form' in art not only enhances the manner of what is being said but also satisfies the

innate human urge for beauty or order. Several devices such as pun, paradox, irony, imagery and rhetorical utterances are consciously employed to enhance the unity and wholeness of each of the works concerned.

On the whole, each of this work under discussion stands as a code governing the everyday experience common to humanbeings in general. The origin of **Proverbs** is traceable to a very distant past when the work was used both on account of its utility in the field of imparting linguistic instruction and for its contribution to morality. As Roland E Murphy observes,

> In the ancient Sumerian school, scribes copied out the various literary works including **Proverbs** as early as the 3rd millenium B C They were used for the practical purpose of learning a language as well as for their intrinsic didactic value (21).

Proverbs appeals to the heart and imagination of its readers, as the wisdom teachers of **The Bible** are realists who deliberately choose to employ tangible images in order to enhance the genuineness of the appeal. Further, through devices like parallelism, a certain aural appeal is added to the visual colouring provided by the work.

The term **'kural'** implies brevity, the couplet form being the shortest kind of stanza in Tamil:

> It is a couplet containing a complete striking idea, expressed in a refined, cryptic and intricate metre. The brevity, rendered necessary by the form, gives a certain oracular effect to the utterances. Probably, the Tamil sage adopted it as being the representative of *'sloka'* in Tamil
>
> (G.U.Pope 6).

With regard to the overall structure, **Proverbs** consists of a Prologue, an Epilogue and a body of Discourses, it being the possible work of several authors including Solomon, Agur and Lemuel, known collectively as 'wise men', though Solomon is explicitly named at the outset as its principal author.

J.C.Rylaarsdam observes, "The basic literary unit of the wisdom literature in Israel is the short Proverbial saying to which the term 'mashal' is applied" (**Peake's Commentary on the Bible** 386). It is considered a self-contained unit, and the literal meaning of 'mashal' is "to be like", and hence it may be surmised that each verse contains in itself a comparison. Further, according to the methodical type

analysis of Gunekal, "the single mashal developed into groups of aphorisms, extended maxims and didactic poems" (**The Old Testament and Modern Study** ed. Rowley 210).

The basic unit of composition in Hebrew poetry is the line or 'stich' which constitutes one half of parallelism. Generally, the lines are arranged in couplets but a certain number of triplets also may occur. In a distich, the first and the second lines are balanced by means of a longer caesura, at the end of the first line which

> consists of two or more lines that use different words to express the same or similar ideas in similar grammatical form (Leyland Ryken 103).

The most frequently used type of parallelism in **Proverbs** is synonymous parallelism, which

> consists of expressing similar content more than once in consecutive lines in similar grammatical form or sentence structure (109).

Each of the following verses can be cited as instances of synonymous parallelism:

> Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. (P.3:13);

> An evil doer listens to wicked lips and a liar gives heed to a mischievous tongue (P.17:4);

and

> A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul. (P.18:7).

Antithetic parallelism occurs

> when the second line states the truth of the first in a negative way or when it, in some way, introduces a contrast by means of which it intensifies the thought (104).

For instance,

> A son who gathers in summer is prudent,
> But a son who sleeps in harvest brings shame (P.10:5);

> In the path of the righteous is life;
> But the way of evil leads to death (P 12:28).

and

> The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul; But the belly of the wicked shall want (P.13:25).

Many such cases occur in **Proverbs**, Chapters 10-15.

Synthetic parallelism is defined in two ways. It consists of a pair of lines that form a complete unit together, in which the second stich simply carries on

the thought of the first, thereby transforming itself into a mere part of a sentence (103).

> If the thought is not carried further but elucidated, it is called synthetic parallelism (**The Form of Hebrew Poetry** 59).

In some couplets, the second line gives the result of the first line:

> In all thy ways, acknowledge Him;
> and He shall direct thy paths. (P 3:6);
> Commit thy works unto the Lord and
> thy thoughts shall be established (P 16:3)

and

> If one gives answer before he hears,
> It is his folly and shame. (P 18:3).

In some instances of synthetic parallelism, the second part often elucidates or expatiates on the first: "The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." (P 16:4).

> The wise in heart shall be called prudent, and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning. (P 16:21);

> A violent man enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him into the way that is not good.
> (P 16:29)

and

> Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterward his mouth shall be filled with gravel (P 20:17).

In verses of this kind, the first part generates a sense of expectation, which gets complemented in the second.

Comparative parallelism occurs mostly in Chapters 25 and 26. For instance, the author of **Proverbs** here makes a comparison of cold water, a well-desired object in the tropics, to glad tidings from a distant land: "As cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country." (P 25:25). Similarly, the value of a wise reprover upon an obedient ear is compared to "an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold" (P 25:12).

Another such instance can be observed in the following comparison:

> As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly. (P 26:1).

Parallelism, a characteristic of Babylonian and Arabic Literatures, serves also the purpose of reiteration. According to Leyland Ryken,

> Hebrew parallelism is not straight - jacket. It is a beautiful example of freedom within form (105).

To Leyland Ryken, antithetic parallelism was an ideal mode of expression for the moralist, for he tended to see the world to offer advice in terms of paired opposites: "good and bad, wise and foolish, poor and rich" (152).

With regard to **Tirukkural**, B.Natarajan argues that the verse couplet is eminently suitable for mass-communication, because of its simplicity, aptness and brevity:

> Nothing could aid this audio-education better than a simple couplet, almost as easy to get currency as a housewife's aphorism ... and imprisoning all essential thoughts on a subject within ten couplets was to ensure that nothing worthwhile was missed. (TSEL 61).

Tirukkural also presents instances of antithetic parallelism, as instanced by the following couplets:

> There is no greater help than the company of the good;
> There is no greater source of sorrow than the company of the wicked. (T1 466);
>
> Men of learning gain, have eyes men say;
> Blockheads' faces pairs of sores display.
> (T 383);

Death is sinking into slumbers deep;
Birth is waking out of sleep (T 339);

Slumber when sleepy work's in hand; beware
Thou slumber not when action calls for sleepless care (T 672);

and

Benignity is eyes' adorning grace;
Without it are wounds disfiguring face (T 515)

The following **kurals** featuring synthetic parallelism, express Tiruvalluvar's world view emphatically:

With plans not well matured to rise against your foe,
Is way to plant him out where he is sure to grow (T 465);

So learn that you may full and faultless learning gain,
Then in obedience meet to lessons learnt remain (T 391)

and

You meet with joy, with pleasant thought you part,
Such is the learned scholar's wondrous art (T 394)

The following are instances of synthetic parallelism designed as a cause-and-effect structure:

The blockheads, too may men of worth appear,
If they can keep from speaking where the learned hear (T 403);

Let each man good thing learn, for even as he,
Shall learn, he gains increase of perfect dignity (T 416).

and

Whose heart delighteth not in pleasure but in action finds delight;
He wipes away his kinsmens's grief And stands the pillar of their might (T 615).

Comparative parallelism abounds in the following **kurals** constructed on an analogy between Nature and human life:

Those who are unable to set forth their acquirements before others are like flowers blossoming in a cluster and yet without fragrance (T1 650).

and

Ambrosia in the sewer spilt, is word
spoken in the presence of an alien herd (T 720).

The imagery used for comparative parallelism in the following verses has a tinge of materialistic, urban life:

> As crowds round dancers fill the hall, is wealth's increase,
> Its loss as though dispersing, when the dancers cease (T 339)

and

> Like sweet milk soured because in filthy vessel poured,
> Is ample wealth in churlish man's unopened coffers stored" (T 1000).

In some couplets, there are interesting rhetorical questions which make them memorable, convey their moral sense and add emphasis.

> Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? (P 8:1);
> Do they not err that devise evil?" (P 14:22)
> Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it? (P 17:16);

and

> A wounded spirit, who can bear? (P 18:14).

The Jewish writer prefers to employ primarily the imperative mood for persuasion, through a command or

caution as can be seen from instances such as the following:

> Put away from you crooked speech; and put devious talks from you (P 4:24);
>
> Forsake the foolish, and live and go in the way of understanding (P 9:6);
>
> Take his garment that is surety for a stranger; and take a pledge of him for a strange woman (P 20:16)

and

> Reprove not a scorner lest he hate thee, rebuke a wisemen and he will love thee (P 9:8).

The command may also employ an injunctive parallelism or antithetic parallelism:

> Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him Answer a fool according to his folly lest he be wise in his own conceit. (P 26:4,5).

According to Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The elaborate bicolon form in which these proverbs are cast gives them a self-consciously artistic character quite different from the folk proverb" (**Sage, Priest, Prophet** 33).

Tirukkural also abounds in rhetorical statements:

If men from enmity can keep their spirits free
Who over them shall gain the victory? (T 855);

If each his own, as neighbours' faults would scan
Could any evil hap to living man? (T1 190);

Is there a bliss in any world more utterly divine,
Than 'Coyness' gives, when hearts as earth and water join? (T 1323)

and

To those who lack the hero's eye, what can the sword avail?
Or science what, to those before the council keen who quail? (T 726).

Literary devices such as imperative statements are liberally employed by Tiruvalluvar. Some of these verses carry nothing but an injunction:

Make money: Foeman's insolence overgrown
To lop away no keener steel is known (T 759);

Guard thou as wealth the power of self-control (T 122);

Trust no man whom you have not fully tried (T 509);

Beware of trusting men who have no kith or kin (T 506)

and

Forsake thou never friends who were thy stay in sorrow sore (T 1106).

Some injunctions are plainly prohibitive.

Never indulge in self-complacent mood
Nor deed desire that yields no gain of good (T 439);

Seek not the gamester's play though you should win (T 931);

Drink not the inebriating draught (T 922);

No more in secret drink and then deny thy hidden fraud (T 928)

and

Make not thy poverty a plea for ill (T 209).

There are also instances of tristich in **Proverbs:**

Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; He shall not stand before unknown men (P 22:29).

All the brothers of the poor do hate him. How much more do his friends go far from him! He pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him (P 19:17).

The employment of tristich (P 25:13), tetrastich (P 27:15), pentastich (P 24:23-25), hexastich (P 23:29-39) and the sonnet type (P 6: 6-11) lend a variety to the main narrative in **Proverbs**.

Further, certain verses in **Proverbs** call the attention of its readers to certain number of similar objects:

> These six things the Lord hate Yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue and hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies and he that soweth discord among brethren (P 6:16-19).

Three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, 'It is enough'. The grave and the barren womb, the earth that is not filled with water and the fire that saith not, It's enough (P 30:15,16), and

> There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea and the way of a man with a maid (P 30:18,19).

The Wisdom writer employs an acrostic poem to define an ideal wife (P31:10-31). Here Charles T Fritsch observes:

> The first letter of each verse follows the order of the Hebrew alphabet. By this device, the writer may be indicating that he is dealing exhaustively with the subject in an orderly way (IB 954).

There are some clusters of **Proverbs** on a single topic such as the passages on the harlot (P9:13-18); drunkard (P23:29-35); sluggard (P24:30-34; 26:13-16); the King (P25:2-7), etc. In chapters 1-9, we find a cogent set of instructions, thematically more unified than the rest of the book.

Tiruvalluvar devotes ten couplets each, to a single motif, in which he employs varying degrees of tonal emphasis. Usually the first seven or eight couplets are stated in an affable style, while the 9th and the 10th are couched in a sterner tone. For instance in 'Not being angry' he considers the angry man as no better than a dead man: "Men of surprising wrath are like men who have passed away" (T1 310).

The slanderer is valued as little more than a burden to the earth:

'Tis charity, I ween that makes the earth sustain their load,
Who neighbour's absence watching, tales or slander tell abroad (T 199).

Dramatic monologues are also employed in **Tirukkural**, especially in **Kāmattuppāl** or the section on Passion and a few in **Porutpal** or the section on Materialism. The following verses are a soldier's pronouncement of doom, for anyone who dares to defy his master:

Ye foes! stand not before my lord, for many a one
Who did my lord withstand, now stands in stone (T 771).

and

You ask what sharper pain than poverty is known;
Nothing pains more than poverty, save poverty alone (T 1041).

In **Kāmattuppāl**, the lover or the maiden expresses sentiments of love and joy in an uninhibited fashion:

If you will say, I leave thee not, then tell me so;
Of quick return tell those that can survive this woe (T 1151).

and

If you would guard my life, from going him restrain,
Who fills my life! If he depart, hardly we meet again (T 1155),

Another lover observes in silent glee:

I look on her; her eyes are on the ground the while;
I look away: she looks on me with timid smile (T 1094).

In addition to dramatic monologues, dramatic dialogues between lovers figure in **Tirukkural**:

I love you more than all beside,
'T was thus I gently spoke;
What all? What all? she instant cried;
And all her anger woke (T 1314);

I silent sat, but thought the more
And gazed on her: Then she
cried out, While thus you eye me o'er
Tell me whose form you see (T 1320)

and

She hailed me when I sneezed one day;
But straight with anger seized;
She cried; Who was the woman, pray,
Thinking of whom you sneezed? (T 1317).

The above dialogue presupposes a popular superstition prevalent in Tamil Nadu till date, that says when someone is thought of intensively he or she tends to sneeze.

Employing the question-answer device, Tiruvalluvar states a certain truth in pithy, epigrammatic descriptions:

You ask what is the good and perfect way
'Tis the path of him who studies not to slay
(T 324);

You ask, in lips of men what 'truth' may be,
'Tis speech from every taint of evil free
(T 291);

What is stupidity? The arrogance that cries,
Behold we claim the glory of the wise
(T 844)

and

What is the work of virtue? Not to kill,
For killing leads to every work of ill
(T 321).

Tiruvalluvar has a tendency to categorize virtues in positive and negative terms. The titles given to various motifs, manifest this technical trait in **Tirukkural**: "The possession of Love"; "Cherishing

Guests"; "Use of felicitous Words"; "Gratitude"; "Impartiality"; "Self- Restraint" etc. are virtues stated in positive form and qualities such as "Not Envying"; "Not Coveting"; "Not Slandering"; "Not Blabbering"; "Not Being Angry"; "Not Doing Evil" etc, are those presented in negative terminology.

Both the writers employ imagery as a primary device for communication in art, upholding the essential truth of the Aristotelian theory of 'mimesis'. In the words of Macleish Archibald, "A metaphor is the supreme agent by which disparate and hitherto unconnected things are brought together in poetry " (**Poetry and Experiences**, 80). The analogy of the whirlwind is used in **Proverbs** in the following verse:

> As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more. But the righteous is an everlasting foundation. (P 10:25).

With regard to the significance of the use of imagery in literature of high seriousness, William Henry Hudson observes,

> It opens out eyes to sensuous beauties and spiritual meanings in the world of human experience and of nature of which otherwise we should remain blind (**Introduction to the Study of Literature**, 90).

To Rene Wellek,

> The visual image is a sensation or a perception but it also stands for, refers to something invisible, something inner. It can be both presentation and representation (18).

In short, what is expressed through an image can be expressed better in no other way. C.Day Lewis defines image in the following terms:

> An epithet, a metaphor, a simile may create an image or an image may be presented to us in a phrase conveying to our imagination something more than the accurate reflection of an external reality (18).

As for the function of imagery in art, it is purely analogical. Cleanth Brooks observes,

> Symbols, metaphors and similes are related in the fact that they all have an analogical function (**Understanding Poetry** 204).

Stratagems such as symbolism, personification, metonymy, synecdoche, etc. are merely varieties of metaphor. Metaphors lend vividness and concreteness, thereby overcoming the cliched effect of stereotyped language in art. According to Herbert Read,

> We should always be prepared to judge a poet ... by the force and the originality of his

> metaphors. The greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor (**The Poetic Image** 17).

While discussing imagery in Shakespeare, Caroline F.E.Spurgeon says,

> It enables us to get nearer to Shakespeare himself, to his mind, his taste, his experiences and his deeper thought .... It throws light from a fresh angle or Shakespeare's imaginative and pictorial vision upon his own ideas about his own plays and the characters in them. (10).

Thus, striking images are used in art, often to create suitable setting and generate emotional and spiritual overtones. Far from being merely ornamental, imagery functions as an integral and essential organ of art.

Metaphor and simile, the most frequently employed imagistic devices, have the ability to illumine, illustrate, emphasize and embellish a poet's message. However, while some metaphors are conventional and easy to comprehend, some others are unusual, highly contrived and apparently far-fetched.

Paul Ricoeur recognizes that the function of imagery in art is that of integrating seeing and feeling, thinking and imagination:

> A metaphor or a simile involves both a thinking and a seeing, and the metaphorical process is cognition, imagination and feeling (**On Metaphor** 145).

In short, the employment of imagery is "the radical process in which the internal relationships peculiar to poetry are achieved " (**Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics** 490).

Further, in several cases, the data inferred from imagery of a work may be of interest in determining the cultural and geographical milieu of poet as well as the audience. According to Wilfred G.E.Watson,

> Hebrew similes share the features of both Akkadian and Ugaritic poetry but in a rather more developed form. There is ellipsis, extension of the simile (257).

The Hebrew Wisdom writer makes use of simple similes, paired similes and triple similes in order to define or suggest certain didactic truths, character, etc. Also, in the case of simple similes, the stunning economy, together with an unerring precision with which

the author handles them, marks him out to be a poet of great virtuosity. For instance,

> A poorman that oppresseth the neighbour is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food (P 28:3);
>
> The teaching of the wise is a tree of life (P.15:4);
>
> Keep my laws as the apple of thine eye (P 7:2)

and

> There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword (P.12:18).

There is also a considerable truth in Wilfred G.E.Watson's observation in this regard: "Since so much of verse is parallelism, many similes come in sets of two" (258) as instanced by the following verses:

> A righteous man falling before the wicked is as "a troubled fountain and a corrupt spring" (P 25:26)

and

> The northwind driveth away rain; so doth an angry countenance and a backbiting tongue (P 25:23).

Triple similes are also employed on rare occasions. For instance,

> A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, a sharp arrow (P 25:8);
>
> Let not mercy and truth forsake thee; bind them about thy neck, write them upon the table of thine heart (3:3)

and

> The fear of the Lord is to hate evil, pride and arrogance (P 8:14).

The following verses from **Tirukkural** also employ the devices of simple similes, paired similes and triplets to explicate certain abstract entities. He compares the fall of a man of high estate to "hairs from off the head fallen to earth " (T 964).

To connote the conspicuous nature of the faults of a man of noble birth, he says that they are "as spots on the moon's bright orb that walks sublime the evening sky" (T 957). Indicative of the effect of sluggishness on a nobleman, Tiruvalluvar employs the image of the lamp:

> Of household dignity, the lustre beaming bright
>
> Flickers and dies when sluggish foulness dim its light (T 601).

Describing the beauty of a maiden, Tiruvalluvar employs a set of paired similes. He compares the soft and tender feet of the beloved to the flowers of the sensitive plant and the down on the swan's white breast. Again, to suggest that the character of a person may be estimated by his deeds, and not by external appearance, Tiruvalluvar makes use of the image of an arrow and a lute:

> Cruel is the arrow straight, the crooked lute is sweet,
> Judge by their deeds, the many forms of men you meet (T 279).

While describing the mental disturbance caused by the beauty of the beloved, Tiruvalluvar resorts to the use of triplets:

> Goddess? or peafowl rare?
> She whose ears rich jewels wear,
> Is she a maid of human kind? (T 1081).

Again,

> The light that on me gleams
> Is it death's dart? or eye's bright beams?
> or fawn's shy glance? All three appear
> In form of maiden here (T 1085).

Further, apostrophe in art is often combined with personification which consists of treating something

nonhuman as though it were a human being, capable of action or response. It is used to suggest the close kinship between people and the subject of a poem, especially when the subject of discussion happens to be Nature itself.

As for personification, it is a poetic device and a figure closely related to metaphor in which

> either an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes or feelings (M.H.Abrams 62).

The following are well-known instances of personification in **Proverbs**. Wisdom and Folly are personified as feminine figures. Wisdom uses every device to awaken people from following mistaken ways. Throughout the book, the imaginary listener or the audience is addressed as "My son". Wisdom addresses men as

> To you men, I call .... O you simple ones, understand prudence (NKJ P 8:4,5);
>
> How long ye simple ones, will you love simplicity? (P 1:22).

and

> She holds in her hand priceless treasures. Length of days is in her right hand and in her left hand, riches and honour (P 3:16).

"Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets" (P 1:20). Here the word 'cry' connotes the intensity of feeling. She laughs at men (1:26); warns them (1:27); and threatens them (1:25), in order to prevent them from following evil ways. Wisdom also prepares a feast and invites a young man to dine at her home. In this episode, Folly is portrayed as a wanton woman who exhorts a gullible person to participate in illicit sex. The contrast between the invitations of Wisdom and Folly, lies in the potential consequences they suggest. In the case of Folly, "She lieth in wait at every corner" (P 7:12), and here, she is pictured as a predator which ruins its victim. Hence, the Wisdom writer advises the young man:

> Say unto wisdom 'Thou art my sister' and call understanding thy kinswoman that they may keep thee from the strange woman (P 7:4,5).

In the verse, "The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death" (P 13:14), Death is thought of as a hunter who spreads his net to ensnare the fools. In "Evil pursueth sinners" (P 13:21), Evil is given a repulsive and aggressive personality. Further, poverty is personified as a highwayman or an armed man (IB 819). While the sluggard sleeps, "Poverty shall come as one that

travelleth, and his want as an armed man." (P 6:11). In P 20:1, wine is referred to as a mocker.

Tiruvalluvar also resorts to the device of personification to make abstract concepts concrete. For instance, Folly is personified as an incongruous, foolish person who suffers from poverty:

> Folly meets fearful ills with fearless heart (T1 428);
>
> The fool is poor of everything possessed (T1 430).

Fortune is personified as a bringer of luck and favour:

> Fortune with gladsome mind shall dwell in the residence of the man who with smiling face, entertains each virtuous guest (T1 84).

Similarly,

> Good fortune draws nigh in helpful time of need
>
> To him who's schooled in virtue (T 179).

and "seeks the man of energy and comes a friend to dwell " (T 594).

Virtue is personified as a power which "attends the path of the man who learns restraint" (T 130), and

Evil as a power of destruction "will dog man's steps and slay" (T 207).

Fame as "Virtue's child" (T 238) suggests that those who adhere to the ethical codes of conduct can obtain fame. Destiny is also personified as a great power: "What power so great as those of Destiny?" (T 380).

There are so many other instances of personification in **Tirukkural**: Death as a cannibal anxious to seize its prey (T 894), Poverty as "malefactor matchless" (T 1042), Wrath as Fire, Envy as "embodied ill" (T 168), Earth, that kindly dame, laughs to see men seated idle pleading poverty (T 1040), God as the "sea of Good and Fair and Bountiful" (T 8), births as the sea (T 10), etc.

Hyperbole, self-conscious exaggeration for the sake of truth, is yet another prominent figure of speech that uses poetic license. To cite an example from **Proverbs**,

> The wicked eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence (P 4:17).

In this context, Charles T.Fritsch observes, "either their food and drink are wickedness, or they acquire their food and drink by wicked means" (IB 810).

Anyway, their addiction to evil makes it as natural as other routine activities such as eating and drinking.

With regard to love of food, the Wisdom writer says,

> When thou sittest to eat with a ruler,
> consider diligently what is before thee.
> And put a knife to thy throat if
> thou be a man given to appetite
> (P 23:1,2).

This is a figurative way of expressing the importance of self-restraint in eating.

Tiruvalluvar uses hyperbole in the description of the beauty of the maiden in the section on 'Love':

> The stars perplexed are rushing wildly from their spheres;
> For like another moon, this maiden's face appears (T 1116).

The lotus seeing her says "with eyes of her rich gems who wears, we cannot vie" (T 1114). The maiden, being intensely romantic, does not wink her eyes "lest she should pain him where he lies" (T 1126) and also she fears that it will "hide his form" (T 1129). She does not eat anything hot, "lest he should feel it burn " (T 1128)

As for metonymy, it is substitution of one word for another word closely associated with it. For example, "Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward" (P22:5).

While describing the wicked man, the Wisdom writer says,

> A naughty person walketh with a froward mouth, winketh with his eyes, speaketh with his feet, teacheth with his fingers - Frowardness is in his heart - he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord (P6:12-14).

Tiruvalluvar also employs metonymy effectively to define his vision of life:

> The king all the whole realm of earth protects;
> And justice guards the king who right respects (T547);

and

> Perpetual, poverty is death to wisdom of the wise;
> When man forgets himself his glory dies! (T532).

Synecdoche occurs when a part is used for the whole. For example, Solomon says:

> Refrain thy foot from their path (P1:15).

> Hell and destruction are never full: so the eyes of men are never satisfied (P 27:20).

Tiruvalluvar, being a poet of great virtuosity, effectively employs synecdoche to infuse variety and delight:

> The wanton's tender arm with gleaming jewels decked,
> Is hell where sink degraded souls of men abject (T 919);

> In flesh by fire inflamed, nature may thoroughly heal the sore;
> In soul by tongue inflamed, the ulcer healeth never more (T 129)

and

> Like tortoise who the five restrains
> In one, through seven world bliss obtains (T 126).

Paradox consists of an apparent contradiction, that upon analysis can be seen to express a more comprehensive truth, though it always imposes on the reader the obligation to resolve an apparent contradiction. King Solomon makes a masterly use of paradox:

> The mercy of the cruel is wicked (P 12:10).

It suggests that even the best acts of wicked people can cause harm:

> There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet but it tendeth to poverty. (P 11:24).

Tiruvalluvar uses paradoxical statements to drive home his sophisticated ethical vision of life. For instance,

> The base are as the gods; they too
> Do ever what they list to do (T 1073);
>
> If a man's speech be productive of a single evil
> All the good by him will be turned into evil. (T 128).

and

> Beneficent intent in men by whom no strenuous work is brought,
> Like battle axe, in sexless being's hand availeth nought (T 614).

The transcendent God of **Proverbs** is repeatedly portrayed in earthly and anthropomorphic terms. For example,

> Honour the Lord with thy substance and with the first fruits of all thine increase (P 3:7).

Here "increase" is associated only with the agricultural produce. True to the tradition of an agrarian society,

> To honour the Lord then is to bring Him gifts as to a king (Charles T Fritsch 801).

In **Tirukkural** also, God is portrayed in anthropomorphic terms. It is significant that Tiruvalluvar uses the phrase "Āti Pakavan" (T1) to refer to the "primal Deity" (T1). Valluvar's conception of God is a positive assertion of God (T1-10), in which mostly abstract qualities are attributed to God. However, he has mentioned the feet of God in **kurals** (T2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10). According to E.S.Muthuswami,

> he might have had an idol in his mind but he has not specified its name nor has he described other features, so as to make it possible for the identification of the same (133).

The vagueness attending upon Tiruvalluvar's definition of God or the primal Deity can be deduced also from the following **kural**:

> Is any sweeter joy in his, the Lotus--eyed-one's heaven? (T1103).

Both **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** abound in rustic imagery. As Raymond E.Brown says, "Ancient moralists drew lessons from the simple observations of plant and animal life" (499). For instance, to Solomon, ants

(P 6:6), conies and spiders are "little upon the earth but they are extremely wise" (P 32:24), as they provide food for themselves, anticipating times of scarcity and providing means for security in the face of danger. Locusts and spiders (P 30:27,28), though hateful and mischievous in the eyes of farmers, constitute an inalienable part in the scheme of the Creator thereby exemplifying His wisdom. P 27:23-27 highlight the fact that sheep and goat stand for the wealthy in society. The central figure in the work is always the farmer. While referring to the beauty and charm of a wife, Solomon employs the image of a 'loving hind' and 'pleasant roe' (P 15:18,19). Interestingly, he chooses to compare the foolish but beautiful woman to a golden jewel in swine's snout (P 11:22), and the foolish man going after a prostitute to an "ox that goeth to slaughter and a bird that hasteth to the snare " (P 7:22). Further, a fool's ferocious anger is compared to "a bear robbed of his whelp" (P 17:12); meddling in others' affairs is to "taking a dog by the ears" (P 26:9); a wicked ruler is "a roaring lion and a ranging bear" (P 28:15); the transience of wealth is likened to "an eagle flying toward heaven" (P 23:5); a rootless man to a wandering bird (P 27:8) and futile motion, to a flying swallow.

Also, Solomon uses hunting imagery with reference to death (P 14:27); fear of man (P 21:6); a fool's lip (P 18:7) and a flatterer's conspiring ways (P 24:5).

Moreover, Solomon uses a plethora of agricultural imagery in his work, such as the following: the root of the righteous (P 12:3,12), flourishes as a branch (P 11:28), suggestive of stability, vitality and fruitfulness.

The imagery of "Tree of life" is employed with reference to wisdom and understanding (P 3:18); fruit of the righteous (P 11:30), hope and desire fulfilled (P 13:12) and a wholesome tongue (P 15:4). To Prof. Toy,

> Tree of life is a familiar figure of speech (3:18) of fulfilled desire, (13:12) of healing speech, (15:4) of the product of integrity, a faded metaphor standing for the source of long and peaceful life (239)

In contrast, "transgressors shall be rooted out" (P 2:22).

Pastoral Imagery is used in **Proverbs** in both positive and negative ways: "An ungodly man diggeth up evil (P 16:28); soweth strife (P 15:18) and "reapeth

sorrow" (P22:8). "To him that soweth, righteousness shall be a sure reward" (P11:18). "Kindling of anger or bringing about strife is comparable to churning of milk bringing forth butter" (P30:33).

Also, king Solomon frequently employs imagery of the seasons - "a wise son gathereth in summer but shame-causing son sleepeth in harvest" (P10:5). The unsuitability of "snow in summer" and "rain in harvest" (P26:1), corresponds to the unseemliness of a fool aspiring to honour. "The man keeping the fig, eating the fruit" signifies the reward of fruitful devotion to one's work. **Proverbs** being an ethical work, employs the imagery of "the way" often. Eg., P4:26, 6:23, 14:12.

Solomon's use of military imagery is considerable too. The Lord is a buckler (P2:7), a shield to those who trust in Him (P30:5) and "a strong tower" (P18:10), suggestive of a strong security enjoyed by the righteous who rely on Him.

Further, Solomon employs archetypal symbols such as fire on a number of occasions exploiting the purifying, tranforming and destroying aspects of fire. "The heaping of live coal on someone's head" in **Proverbs** (25:23), is probably a metaphor derived from a ritual of

reconciliation, once observed in ancient Egypt. The convicted "carried a pan filled with live coal on his head as a sign of his change of mind"(Roland de Vaux 35), indicating probably an inner spiritual transformation.

King Solomon has also made use of the archetypal symbol of water, in **Proverbs**: "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life." (P 14:4), "The mouth of the righteous is a wellspring of life" (P 10:11), and "The words of a man's mouth is deep waters and the wellspring of wisdom is a flowing brook " (P 18:4). Again, wisdom is described as "a gushing torrent that never runs dry " (Dake 654) In contrast, "The poor oppressing the poor is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food " (P 25:3).

Tiruvalluvar also draws his similes and metaphors from common life, a trait which lends a realistic touch to his analysis of human situations. To suggest an inconsistent conduct, Tiruvalluvar employs the image of a cow feeding on grass, covered with a tiger skin (T 273), and to suggest the incongruity of inner and outward appearances (T 277), he employs the **kunri**, a seed which is colourful but poisonous.

As for Tiruvalluvar's use of animal imagery, the image of "the fish taking in the baited hook" (T 931), is

used to suggest the futility of gain in gambling. The wild yark pining away if bereft of the tuft of hair (T 969), is used as a symbol of honour. Tiruvalluvar also employs a series of images to connote the need for circumspection before plunging into action such as "a crocodile prevailing in water" (T 495), "a crow conquering an owl in broad daylight" (T 483) and "a jackal slaying an elephant of fearless eye in marshy fen" (T 500). Further, a bullock struggling on an obstructed path (T 624), is suggestive of a man's perseverance, surmounting hurdles. Elsewhere, the crow is used as a symbol of gregariousness (T 527). The image of the axle of a cart giving in under pressure when overloaded, though with only fine peacock feathers, suggests a sense of sudden loss caused by an excessive action.

Moreover, the following instances of hunting imagery reveal the style of life lived by the people of Tamil Nadu in ancient times. In **Tirukkural**, a fowler lurking in a thicket to snare the silly birds is compared to a hypocritical man clad in stern ascetic garbs devising evil secretly (T 274). The imagery of an elephant being used to snare its fellow brute is compared to an action taken which leads to the accomplishment of a second action (T 678). The tendency

of the huge elephant shrinking alarmed at the imminent threat of a tiger (T 599), conveys the disproportionate superiority enjoyed by some smaller predators over bigger animals.

As for agricultural imagery, Tiruvalluvar says that farmers are the linchpin of the world (T 1032), and he compares rain to "the true ambrosial food of all that live." (T 11). His use of the image of "clouds of heaven" suggests the generous gift of rain which never expects reciprocation (T 211), and "dry rainy cloud suggests the temporary poverty of a generous, wealthy, man " (T 1070).

Further, the untaught is likened to "a barren field, which yields nothing" (T 405) and the ignorant babbler to "the chaff of humanity" (T 196). Also, futility of wise words before fools, is likened to "ambrosia in the sewer spilt" (T 720). Lecturing to those who can think for themselves is like to "sprinkling water on the fields of growing grain" (T 718). Further, "The ample wealth of the churl remaining useless is like sweet milk turning sour in filthy vessel" (T 1000).

The image of the lotus blossom is employed to suggest lack of constancy in friendship as it has a tendency to close and open (T 425). The unfailing love

of a kin is "like flower that fadeless blooms" (T 522). Scentless flower used in a floral garland (T 650) represents those who are unable to set forth their acquirements before others. The disappointed expression of the guest as a result of cold welcome (T 90), reminds the poet of the touch-me-not behaviour of the *'Anicha'* flower.

As for the imagery of trees, the wealth of a person "who is disliked by all is like the fruits borne by the poisonous *'etty'* tree in the midst of a town" (T 1008). Tiruvalluvar uses the image of the lush bamboo tree to suggest the shoulders of the beloved, and its "tender shoot" to the delicate frame of the maiden (T 1113).

Like Solomon, Tiruvalluvar also makes good use of the archetypal image of fire. Hostility or the incomplete or lukewarm execution of an undertaking will destroy one like "the smouldering fire" (T 674).

> When blazes forth the wrath of men of lofty fame,
> Kings even fall from high estate and perish in the flame. (T 899);
>
> Since evils new from evils ever grow,
> Evils than fire works out more dreaded woe.
> (T 202)

and

> The hotter glows the fining fire, the gold the brighter shines;
> The pain of penitence, like fire, the soul of man refines (T 267).

To underscore the essential need of forethought in order to ensure one's own success, Tiruvalluvar employs the image of "straw before fire that shall swift away" (T 435).

Thus both **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** have many things in common, with regard to the imagery used, and the readers certainly get a bird's eye view of the culture and conventions of the Near East and Tamil Nadu from them. Both the societies compared here, were patriarchal governed by monarchies, and sustained by agriculture, hunting and other skills of craftsmanship. They had realized also the indispensability of learning and the value of education.

Both the works compared here use literary devices such as simple similes, paired similes and triplets. The sheer abundance of literary techniques and artistry characterized by a typical sense of delicacy in phraseology, rhythmic melody and cadence render **Proverbs** a veritable literary masterpiece, especially in the King

James Version. The images employed also bear witness to the writer's insights and close observation of the fauna and flora peculiar to the Near East.

The immortality of the **Kural** is founded not only on its exhortations for a good life but also to the purity of its diction and its masterful exploitation of style. Rene Wellek recognizes the unifying value latent in the stylistic analysis, in respect of all literary works:

> Stylistic analysis seems most profitable to literary study when it can establish some unifying principle, some general aesthetic aim pervasive of the whole work (182).

While it is obvious that **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** do not adopt an identical literary style, in terms of the range of imagery employed in them and the consequent exploitation of their literary implication, their preoccupation with diction, structure, rhythm, minute observation of natural phenomena and their innate penchant for ornamentation, these works do bear a considerable similarity, and hence, lend themselves to a rewarding comparative study.

SUMMING UP

The above comparative study of **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural**, besides highlighting the greatness of the two works analysed, may enable any perceptive reader to recognize the underlying unity of all great literary creations: "Literature is one, as art and humanity are one " (**Theory of Literature** 50). Despite all the obvious differences between the works in respect of their periods of conception and execution, cultures of the communities involved and sociological differences between the two authors, there is an amazing degree of similarity in respect of the thematic content and artistic vision of the two works. They deal with the fundamental immutable principles of human life and behaviour, basic human qualities, feelings, emotions and essential moral values like love and truth, beauty and goodness.

Both the works discussed are well-acknowledged world classics. Of all the canonized works in ancient Hebrew literature, **Proverbs** is the most widely read piece of literature, perhaps next only to the **Psalms**, and it can truly boast of being one of the world's greatest repositories of cultural values. The numerous translations of **Tirukkural** in Indian and foreign

languages and innumerable commentaries on the book bear an eloquent testimony to the greatness of the Tamil classic. As K.Chellappan observes,

> **Tirukkural** is a world classic due to its comprehensive universal vision of life, clothed in fine poetry. Though it is rooted in Tamil culture, it belongs to the entire world. His hero is entire humanity and his profound criticism of life is relevant to all possible situations in life (**Kural Portraits** 18).

In respect of Age and Background of the works discussed, Solomon's sayings constitute the main body of **Proverbs** and they date back to as early as 700 B C., while the remaining portion of **Proverbs** is assignable to the 2nd century B C. **Proverbs** forms part of world literature such as the wisdom literatures of ancient Egypt and Babylonia.

As regards **Tirukkural**, some controversies persist till date, in respect of its date of composition. The dates assigned vary from 1st century to 5th century A D , and, in the light of recent stylistic analysis, its most likely date of composition has been fixed by eminent scholars as 2nd century A.D.

Though **Tirukkural**, by and large, espouses the prominent values professed in Jainism, several scholars also claim that the Tamil work presents many features which prove beyond doubt that it could be called an eminent work governed by the fundamental Hindu concepts like **Karmā**, **Dharmā** and **Aram**. However, the heart of **Tirukkural** is the soul of Man.

The dissertation, among other ventures, makes an attempt to define Wisdom Literature and points to several features common to the Wisdom Literature of Mesopotamia and that of Israel.

Tirukkural can be called God-centred in its essence, only on purely vague, inferential terms, as its essential message is humanistic. The Hebrew ontological definition of the Divine in terms of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence tends to be more definitive compared to that of **Tirukkural**.

There is a remarkable reticence in **Tirukkural** with regard to the sense of fear and awe that the individual must cultivate in his relationship with God, a feature prominent in **Proverbs**.

Tirukkural posits ethical virtues in the light of **Dharmā**, the selfless path of goodness, and is of the view that an individual is potentially capable of

overcoming his 'fate' in contrast to the Jewish concept of divine ordination of things. It is an interesting fact that, while discussing the metaphysical issue of the conflict between predestination and free will, both **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** pit the same philosophical and dialectical entities against each other. **Tirukkural's** presentation of human life on earth itself, in terms of retribution and reward, is in sharp contrast to the teleological vision in **Proverbs**.

Tirukkural tends to formulate its ethics on **Karmā**, an action-oriented doctrine which yet makes claims to certain dimensions of spirituality, utterly an alien concept to the writer of **Proverbs**. **Tirukkural** accords a greater stress to the omnipotence of fate compared to **Proverbs**, though it does not totally rule out the dignity consisting in each human endeavour, in its confrontation with Fate. In fact, **Tirukkural's** vision can be interpreted even in purely existential terms.

Tirukkural talks of the absolute Supreme Being as an indefinable and impersonal God, while **Proverbs** presents God as omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, who is also a Personal Being interested in the affairs of every individual.

Proverb's view of Godhead is uncompromisingly monotheistic, while **Tirukkural** deliberately chooses a

vague diction while referring to God, as for example in its to reference to the 'Alpha' of creation.

Both **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** attempt to lay down a comprehensive code of personal and social ethics. Any comparative study calls for a widening of perspectives and a suppression of local and regional sentiments. S.S.Prawer observes:

> Comparative Literature can be defined as an examination of literary texts ... through an investigation of contrast, analogy, prominence or influence or a study of literary relations (**Comparative Literary Study, An Introduction** 8).

Both the writers in question have transcendent goals, utterly regardless of differences of race and religion. Both the works are preoccupied with the issue of pragmatic wisdom.

The thesis expounds the fact that both **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** tend to lay down didactic codes, keeping the family as the central norm. It makes an attempt to define 'ethics' as a genre.

Proverbs is more explicitly teleological compared to **Tirukkural**. **Tirukkural** tends to be more deontological in comparison with **Proverbs**. **Tirukkural's**

approach to normal doctrine is influenced, to an uncommon degree, by a sound knowledge of human psychology, compared to the code of behaviour set down by **Proverbs**, primarily due to the fact that the latter is essentially a product of monistic Jewish tradition. The former work, according to several scholars, was conceived and executed during an age of transition in Tamil Nadu's religious history.

Both **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** address themselves to issues of harmony, peace, security and justice in a world without barriers, and they keep a householder as their primary audience, not a recluse or an anchorite. Both the works exalt the virtue of 'agape' in marriage. Both approve of hedonistic pursuits upto a generous limit and strongly advocate the course of conjugal love. They also endorse the value of monogamy.

Proverbs assigns to an enterprising woman a field of concern far beyond the boundaries of her home, while **Tirukkural** sees woman primarily as home-centred. Both the works laud the virtue of chastity in woman, and condemn audltery in men and women in one voice. They exalt filial love as a vital virtue, and stress the need for parental love for children. While **Proverbs** advocates corporal punishment, Tiruvalluvar does not do so, in keeping with the tenets laid down by modern

psychologists; both advocate parental duty to educate children.

Proverbs seems to represent the composite culture of the collective wisdom of the Middle East, while **Tirukkural** represents eminently a Tamil tradition, despite its transcendent vision.

As for the tone of the works, **Proverbs** seems to be bordering on the dictatorial while **Tirukkural** adopts a tone of sweet reasonableness as it relies primarily on the earthly logic and pragmatic insights into human psychology. On the whole, God-centred ethics are defined in absolute terms in **Proverbs**, and certain inviolable deontological codes of human conduct are laid down in a tone of uncompromising sternness and emphasis. On the other hand, Tiruvalluvar lays down a more humane code that is far more realistic and pragmatic, stressing constantly the spirit of humanism at its core.

The dissertation also seeks to highlight the fact that just like any work of art, the works compared here also contain certain temporal and permanent values attending on them. Motifs related to an individual's relationship with his neighbours in society in both the works have been taken up for a close scrutiny, in order to analyse the nuances concerning different kinds of relationships such as personal, social, political, etc.

Both the works attempt to show how good neighbourly relationships help to promote the happiness security of the individuals concerned. It is interesting to note that both of them pick out common negative social traits like slander, pride, envy, anger, babbling, flattery and drunkenness for particular disapproval. While dwelling on the motif of truth, Tiruvalluvar makes a finer distinction between absolute Truth and truth in daily life. Certain amazing parallels in respect of *'stoff'* and *'gehalt'* in both the works under discussion, have also been pointed out. It is significant that Tiruvalluvar stresses in an insightful, metaphysical and sociological vein, the vanity of accumulation of riches beyond the point of basic needs. While dwelling on the motif of pride, **Proverbs** makes a finer metaphysical distinction between pride and quiet self-assurance. It may be claimed that **Tirukkural** in the final analysis, does not visualize the need for reducing all personal or social ethics to an absolute, uncompromising scale of values.

The dissertation also surveys the codes laid down by the works in respect of social and political governance. Both **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural** visualize monarchy as the ideal form of government. They highlight desirable personal qualities in a good ruler.

While norms pertaining to public administration in **Proverbs** may be roughly classified as God-centric, **Tirukkural** looks upon statecraft from the point of view of **Aram** and **Dharma**. Though **Proverbs** asserts, in unequivocal terms, the Divine Right of kings, it does concede to the fact that rulers are fallible. It is interesting to observe that **Tirukkural** does not advance such a theory, probably because the region of which it is an offshoot, might not have come across any such long, continued lines of royal inheritance at that time. To assert the validity in such a doctrine would have certainly been fraught with dangerous consequences at a such turbulent time of political uncertainties.

As for counsellors to royalty, **Proverbs** views them only from the royal perspective and counsels rulers to pay heed to even unpalatable observations in their own interests, especially when mouthed by sagacious advisers. In contrast, Tiruvalluvar exhorts counsellors at the royal court to be forthright and unequivocal in their observations in the royal presence. In this respect, **Tirukkural** may be credited with its foresightful anticipation of the essential democratic process of governance which was to come into vogue in the centuries that were to follow all over the globe. **Tirukkural's** preoccupation with pragmatic handling of

political affairs can be especially seen in its endorsement of the positive aspects of the Machiavellian astuteness and daring, in respect of royal counsellors.

The dissertation also views both the works from a feminist focus. Both the works comment on the role of women in society and family, and offer pertinent counsel on different aspects of man-woman relationships. While dwelling on the virtues and values of woman, it is significant that **Tirukkural** recognizes chastity as a virtue that pertains not only to the physique but as an entity concerning the psyche, and stresses the fact that chastity is of equal relevance to men and women. It is of equal significance that Tiruvalluvar denies the woman an unchallengeable right to co-exist with men on perfectly equal terms. He also asserts that a man should not ever become a slave to his wife.

This dissertation also makes a few comments on some of the salient literary features of the works compared, such as their structural patterns, imagery, figures of speech, symbols and other stylistic features.

That only a comparative study of literary works is capable of defining and highlighting some of the peculiar yet unique features in any work of art is borne out by the above analysis. There is a considerable

profit beyond doubt, in a comparative study of **Proverbs** and **Tirukkural**. As K.Chellappan observes,

> Comparative Literature, as a study of Literature independent of ethnic, linguistic and geographical boundaries has been a liberating and humanising force on Literature itself by breaking the boundaries and focusing on the unity of human creativeness underlying the diversity of the literary events. But it is much more than a mere search for sameness or oneness through a simple juxtaposition of texts. The study also provide a wider perspective by making mutual illumination of literatures possible (**Comparative Literature: Some Perspectives** 1).

Proverbs and **Tirukkural** are immortal literary creations produced by two distinguished ancient civilizations, which are totally relevant to the contemporary generation of humanity at the turn of the millennium, despite the fact that they were fashioned several centuries ago. Their greatness lies in the fact that they can serve us still as beaconlights of an ageless human civilization which can see us through all challenges of the existential pilgrimage in which we all are embarked, on account of the pragmatic guidelines they offer and their irrepressible, robust optimism.

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